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AUSTRALIAN **ROADRIDER** THE REAL RIDE



AUSTRALIAN **ROADRIDER** THE REAL RIDE

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IT'S STARTED

BY: NIGEL PATERSON



The process is renewing itself. Over and over again I see it happen, year-in and year-out. We get into spring and new life is born – well, new bikes anyway, even if they only seem to be alive.

I'm heading to the USA soon and I don't even know what I'll be riding yet. The manufacturer (it doesn't matter which one, they all work the same way) keeps the model under wraps as long as possible, but they understand it's difficult to disappear overseas for a week on a few weeks' notice, so they send out a "save the date" notification, then a more formal invite. Usually, by the time you board the aeroplane you know what you'll be riding, or at least what gear to bring – I'd hate to turn up at a cruiser launch with track leathers.

And where I was getting a bit stale through winter – which my partner noticed and whisked me off to Phuket to get me out of my funk – now I'm excited, because there are new models coming, new bikes to ride, new technologies to test. I'm keen to try out the automatic bikes, despite the vitriol against them online. I'm betting there was just as much pushback against the idea of paddle-shift automatics in the sportscar world and guess what? It's hard, and expensive, to get a high-end car with a clutch lever these days.

I'm also excited by the updates, how manufacturers keep making bikes that little bit better – like the Triumph Speed Twin featured on page 14. A little more power, improvements to the chassis, a little more tech... should be a lovely bike to ride, and I'm finding naked bikes have more and more appeal these days, probably because I now have bikes for different uses.

I've still got my old FJR1300, which is now old enough to vote. It's still a good thing, but is feeling its age in some ways, and I really wish it had cruise control and better thermal control – this time of year it's too hot to ride it. So I'll be out on my naked, an FZ6 I built from a stat write-off and a former race bike. It's fun to ride, but really, I'd prefer a twin for how I use it... which is interesting, because nearly all midrange bikes designed for street use, rather than track riding, are now twins. For getting dirty, I should have an adventure bike by the time you read this. I've got my eye on something and there's a plan...

And that should do me for the moment; paying regos and insurance on more than three bikes really starts to hurt (especially given I have a car and trailer, too). We should be able to bundle our bike regos together, maybe even on one number plate across

different bikes... currently the argument is different people can ride the bikes at the same time (as if we're all lending our bikes out to other people!) so you have to have a separate rego for each... it's rubbish.

I hope you're excited by the coming year, I hope you're looking to go riding, if not on a new bike then on an old one, for I've found plenty of joy in old bikes as well as new ones. Whatever floats your boat really.

For me the coming year represents the chance to do more riding, to travel further and visit new places, exploring the best way possible – by motorcycle. Hope you get to do the riding you want to do in 2025 too.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Got something to get off your chest relating to motorcycles? Want to tell

the editor what sort of an idiot he is?

You can do this and read what other readers think on the road rider website at roadrider.com.au/letters-to-the-editor.

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YAMAHA'S NEW- GENERATION AUTOMATIC

Yamaha has tried paddle-shift automatic transmissions in the past, but the FJR1300-equipped bike from 20-odd years ago didn't sell and was quickly discontinued. However, Honda's ongoing success with its dual-clutch transmission is seeing Yamaha, along with numerous others, have another go.

Unlike the Honda system, Yamaha's is an "Automated Manual Transmission", hence the moniker Y-AMT. It essentially uses a computer to take over the gearshifting role in automatic mode, or the rider controls the system through paddles on the left switchblock, telling the computer when to change. The clutch and gear levers are eliminated.

Yamaha describe the system as follows: "Set to revolutionise the sport riding experience, Y-AMT allows riders to fully focus on the MT-09's thrilling performance by redefining the process of changing gear to either a finger-operated shift or fully automatic, to deliver consistently linear shifts, creating the most engaged and immersive riding experience."

An ARR Facebook post describing the system fired up our followers, with numerous derisory comments often implying a lack of manhood to those who chose not to stay with a manual gearbox.

Then there were comments from people with injuries who pointed out it might actually help some people keep riding when they otherwise couldn't, so the system may suit them. Beyond the vitriol though, I've seen similar attitudes to so much technology introduced to motorcycles, and I've read about how even things like rear suspension were derided back when it was being introduced, considered by some as "unnecessarily complex and adding weight". And don't get me started on how riders hated the idea of ABS (OK, some still do).

TECHNICAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Manual shifting via finger-operated "see-saw" switch
- Automated clutch and gear shift actuated by electric motor
- Two automatic shift modes: D+ and D
- Smart Key System

Personally I reckon most high-end bikes will go this way over the coming decade. It'll end up cheaper just to make a single run of engines with paddle shifters and automatic, as it is with cars; it's pretty hard to buy a manual transmission motor car today, and if you can find one it'll probably cost extra.

Yamaha claims "shifting by hand alone, opposed to a foot-and-hand combination,

is not only quicker, but requires less thinking time, allowing the rider to hyper-focus on throttle and brake application, lean angle, body position and tyre grip levels to intensify the ride, especially in cornering. Gear changes are activated through a tactile seesaw switch placed conveniently at the rider's left-hand fingertips. Riders can either use their thumb and index finger to upshift with the plus lever, and downshift with the minus lever, or opt for a single-finger operation for sportier riding, using only the index finger to shift by pulling the plus lever to shift up, and pushing it to shift down for the ultimate sporty ride.

"Retaining all the qualities which make the MT-09 a class leader, the MT-09 Y-AMT combines the standard machine's agile handling and feisty performance with a transformational transmission system which allows the rider to choose between a finger-operated manual transmission, offering an even more engaged riding experience, and the pure convenience of a fully automatic gear change.

"The clutch and gear shift operation are each actuated by an electric motor, eliminating the need for both the traditional clutch lever and a foot operated gear shifter, allowing the rider to better focus on their riding flow. The MT-09 Y-AMT's manual transmission (MT) offers a completely new way

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In manual mode you change with your fingers.



The auto/manual switch is on the right switchblock.



The system controls an existing clutch.

in which to experience the thrill of Yamaha's CP3 motor. With a closer and more refined connection to the brain than the feet, the hands are one of the most tactile and powerful tools the human body has. At standstill and low speeds, the Y-AMT system controls the clutch and gearbox operation, making the machine easier to control when moving off, performing manoeuvres and in heavy traffic. The system completely takes over gear shifting functions when in one of the two AT modes, but can be overridden using the see-saw lever.

"The D+ mode unleashes the CP3 motor's famous character, maintaining higher revs for longer as it changes up and down through the six-speed transmission. Alternatively, D mode delivers a softer and more confidence-inspiring fully automated gear shift to aid low speed and urban riding, ideal for commuting and on journeys where the rider wants to enjoy a more relaxing ride.

"Where previous generations of automatic gearboxes may have been aimed only at comfort and convenience, Y-AMT prides itself on enhancing the torquey and agile nature of the MT-09, delivering a more engaging experience for riders. Toggling between MT and AT modes is easy and can be done on the move by activating the button on the right-hand switchgear, allowing the rider to transform the nature of the MT-09 Y-AMT in a heartbeat."

The Y-AMT version should be in showrooms by the time you read this. Pricing hasn't been announced.

2024 MT-09 AND MT-09 Y-AMT — SHARED TECHNICAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Sharp and compact looks including redesigned bi-functional LED headlight
- 5in full-colour TFT screen with smartphone connectivity and navigation
- Customisable riding experience via Yamaha Ride Control (YRC) settings
- Modify YRC settings via smartphone with MyRide app
- Engaged riding position
- Separated passenger seat unit
- Precise formed fuel tank
- Acoustic amplifier grille
- Latest 890cc, three-cylinder, four-valve DOHC liquid-cooled, EU5+ CP3 engine
- Six-axis IMU with full suite of lean-sensitive rider aids
- Cruise control
- Brembo radial master cylinder
- Lightweight CF aluminium die-cast frame
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UPGRADES AND A NEW-MODEL TRIUMPH SPEED TWIN

Higher performance — with an extra five horsepower — and a new RS model are the headline acts for Triumph's retro naked performance model, the Speed Twin 1200. Changes to the chassis and the introduction of new technology — notably cornering ABS and traction control — are also included for improved handling and dynamic performance.

Changes to the standard Speed Twin include a new fuel tank, engine casings, throttle body covers, headlight and bracket,

seat, mufflers and wheels. Ergonomically Triumph has made the standard Speed Twin a little roomier by lifting the handlebars nearly 18mm and moving the footpegs back 13.4mm.

The forks, Marzocchi 43mm USD units, have been upgraded, while the rear shocks are twin piggyback units from the same manufacturer.

There are two riding modes — the RS gets three. The new high-spec model also gets Öhlins rear shocks, a quickshifter, a sportier riding position including higher pegs and lower

bars, Metzeler Racetec RR K3 tyres, Brembo Stylema calipers and different colours.

The standard Speed Twin will be available in Crystal White & Sapphire Black, Carnival Red & Sapphire Black or Aluminium Silver. The RS comes in Baja Orange & Sapphire Black or Sapphire Black.

Triumph's chief product officer, Steve Sargent, said: "The new Speed Twin 1200 RS is more focused, more engaging and with even sharper responses. It's designed for riders who want the absolute best in dynamic

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FOR THE RIDE

performance, with classic sporty looks. The updates to the new Speed Twin 1200 are a significant evolution for this much-loved model, and as always we've made sure we retain the superior handling and classic style that everyone admires, while introducing extra power and technology that improves the riding experience seamlessly."

The new tank is more sculpted, with raked lines and deep front cutouts, and there is a new flip-up filler cap. The side panels are simpler and styled to integrate into the new minimal throttle body covers with their brushed aluminium finisher. Many classic-inspired details have been refined and updated, including new black powder-coated engine casings, which are now leaner and more angular. More compact

silencers add to the timeless beauty of the uninterrupted exhaust run. The elegant round headlight is now an LED unit with a new DRL light signature, with a new brushed-aluminium bezel and stylish cast-aluminium finishers.

The stunning one-piece bench seat has been reprofiled to be shallower and more sculpted, matching the sporty styling, and is narrower at the front, facilitating an easier stand-over position for riders. The RS seat gains a sporty and stylish napped finish with exceptional stitch detailing.

New cast-aluminium wheels perfectly complement the new bodywork, with seven pairs of slim spokes angled in a sporty turbine pattern. There are also new instruments and a USB-C charging port.

ROAD RIDER'S TAKE

The Speed Twin is a fun bike, with its retro good looks and soulful parallel twin engine... but it's never been a powerhouse, limited to 100 horses, and an extra five isn't going to set the world on fire. However, high performance isn't what this bike is all about, despite the word "Speed" in the name.

No, this is about dialling in a comfortable pace on a winding road and holding that pace, taking the corners in a flowing style, preserving your speed and cranking from side to side through flowing turns. If that's your idea of a sporty ride, the Speed Twin and especially its mate the Speed Twin RS are likely to please.

Pricing hasn't been announced. Bikes should be in showrooms early in the new year. **ARR**

WIN A NÜRBURGRING EXPERIENCE OR INDIAN SCOUT 101 WITH SHANNONS



Shannons has another of its awesome competitions running, this time offering you the chance to win a trip for two to Germany and Belgium to experience an exhilarating taxi lap of the legendary Nürburgring in a Porsche GT3 RS, attend the Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS race at the CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa, and visit the BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Porsche Museums.

The 13-day trip includes airfares, luxury accommodation in Munich, Stuttgart, Nürburg, Spa and Frankfurt, and \$5000 spending money. There's also a new Indian Motorcycle 101 Scout in Ghost White to be won! You could win more than \$88,000 in prizes.

So, if you're a motoring enthusiast, go online or call Shannons on 13 46 46 to take out new eligible car, bike or home insurance to enter. Call Shannons on 13 46 46 or go online: shannons.com.au/germany

Competition closes 16 December, 2024. T&Cs & eligibility apply.

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RETURN OF THE BIG SINGLE?

Royal Enfield has launched the Guerrilla, what would have once been considered a Big Single roadster. It's the second bike to feature the Sherpa 450 liquid-cooled motor we've seen before in the current Himalayan, but this bike is aimed at street use, and as such it's going to be compared to the big singles of "the old days".

There was a time when a 500cc single-cylinder motorcycle was not just considered large capacity, but also hit the sweet spot of weight, performance, handling and value... and in many ways we can see the Guerrilla doing the same thing, although for somewhat different reasons.

The days of the 500cc single were post WWII until the 1960s. During that decade, twins became more reliable, affordable, and offered higher performance than the singles. Then, in 1969, Honda released the four-cylinder CB750 and the motorcycling world was transformed, almost overnight... the Brits went broke and the Japanese manufacturers we ascendant.

But times change and 50 years later, here's a new big single road bike, albeit 450cc rather than 500, but of course modern technology means the new Guerrilla would eat up and spit out any road-going 500 from past eras,

despite its LAMS approval and moderate performance by modern standards.

But where 500s back in the day were prized for their overall abilities, these days the Guerrilla will appeal to an audience looking for a basic machine that can offer decent performance with low weight, great value for money, a modern interpretation of classic looks and some versatility via accessories and easy customisation.

Royal Enfield gets those things right in spades, using materials and techniques which custom builders can modify, offering reasonably priced accessories which are functional, beautiful and easy to fit, building

engines with character and wrapping it all up in a chassis that works fine at road speeds with engines that have character.

I can see many an inner-city dweller parking a Guerrilla outside their house, using it to commute to work, shoot down to the beach, get across town to catch up with friends and maybe, just maybe, work on it themselves to learn about things mechanical.

The Royal Enfield Guerrilla is on sale now and is available in three colours: Yellow Ribbon (\$8690 ride away), Brava Blue (\$8690) and Playa Black (\$8590). Keep an eye on *Australian Road Rider* for a full test as soon as we can get our grubby mitts on one. **ARR**



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GET A DEMO



A GOOD LOOK AROUND

A 700km trip starting from California...

BY CHRIS DALY



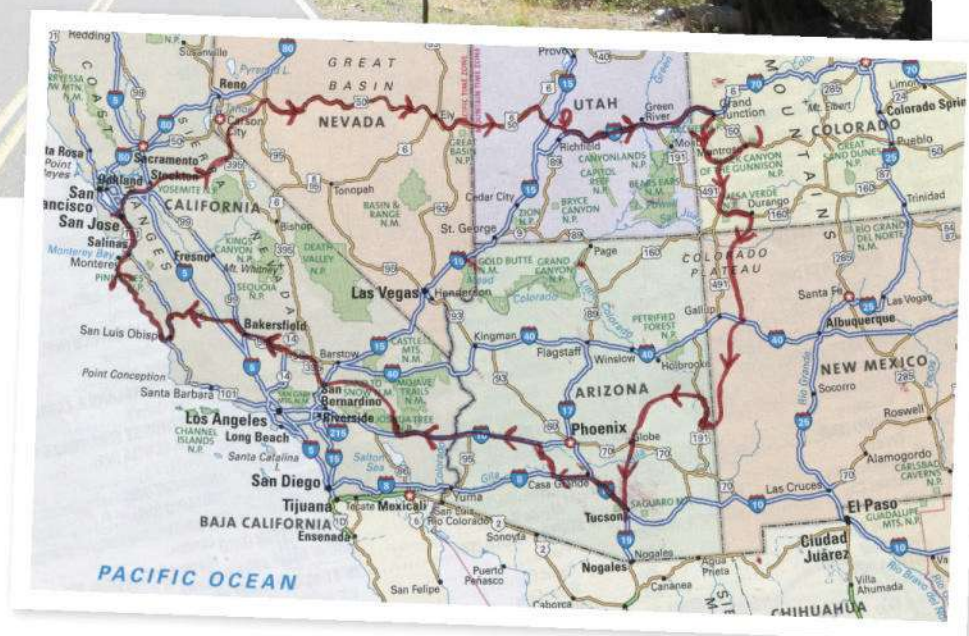
Sonora Pass Road, California.

The sign warned that the highway ahead was not patrolled. I wasn't sure whether this was an invitation to do stupid speeds or a warning that if we got into trouble, we were on our own. I thought it was probably the latter.

We were at the start of the Devil's Highway in Arizona, 150km through rough backcountry with no services or settlements along the way. The highway had started in a mine where huge 400-ton trucks lumbered across the road in front of us, and now we were about to start climbing through hundreds of tight corners and switchbacks on a road described as "challenging" and by one website as "scary".

SAN FRAN

Our road trip had commenced in San Francisco, California, a couple of weeks previously when we navigated our way to Sonora in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. We crossed the Sierras on Sonora Pass Road, cresting the summit at an elevation of 2933m, which is higher than Australia's tallest mountain, Mount Kosciuszko (2228m). The road had endless curves, a smooth surface, good views and, best of all, no traffic. On the other side, we crossed into Nevada to ride US Highway 50 (US-50), called "America's Loneliest Road", east to Utah.



"CLIMBING UP THROUGH CURVES AND CUTTINGS TO THE SUMMIT OF A RANGE OF HILLS, WE WOULD DESCEND THE OTHER SIDE THROUGH MORE BENDS..."

America's Loneliest Road is a popular ride, even though it is mainly on an arrow-straight road, and motorcyclists proudly wear lapel badges proclaiming: "I Survived Highway 50." The road is a series of peaks and troughs. After climbing up through curves and cuttings to the summit of a range of hills, we would descend the other side through more bends onto a straight ribbon of asphalt stretching through flat country to yet more hills on the

horizon. We repeated this exercise again and again for 500km. Recent rain had greened the desert and wildflowers decorated the side of the road. We really enjoyed the ride.

Due to its remoteness, Great Basin National Park in Nevada is one of the least-visited national parks in the USA. From the National Park Service (NPS) visitor centre just off US-50 near the Utah state line, we gained 1300m in elevation in 15km as we rode up a winding

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America's Loneliest Road, Nevada.



Happy pillion. America's Loneliest Road, Nevada.



Great Basin National Park, Nevada.



road through an autumn extravaganza of gold-coloured aspen trees. It was a lovely ride with a picture-perfect view of rugged mountains in the background. At the end of the road we explored some easy trails through the forest beneath Wheeler Peak (3982m), which towered 1000m above us. This scenic national park was certainly worth visiting.

Crossing into Utah, we stayed at Salina from where we did a day ride up US-89 through rural towns like Gunnison, where my quilter wife found a quilt shop to visit. That happens a lot on road trips and always keeps the pillion happy. Utah Highway 31 (UT-31) was a terrific winding road up to a 3011m summit and then on to Huntington Reservoir, where the aspen leaves were turning red and gold. Returning down UT-31, we passed many bikes going the other way and gave them the American wave, which

involves pointing your left hand down at the road. American motorcyclists are good wavers.

Next stop was Colorado, so we headed east on a chilly morning to Green River, Utah, where a customised, psychedelic-looking Harley arrived ridden by an equally colourful and fashionable-looking lady. It was the famous Diva Amy, who started her own motorcycle fashion and accessories company called Team Diva with the motto: "Anything worth doing is worth overdoing." One look at Amy and her bike and we understood the motto completely. She has a large social media following among American bikers and

is well known for charity work. We had a good chat with her and, as they say in the USA, she was "quite a gal".

SCENIC BYWAYS

After overnighting in Grand Junction, Colorado, we rode south on Colorado Highway 141 (CO-141), called the Unaweep/Tabaguache Scenic Byway, that twisted its way for 170km to Naturita along a valley with 50m-high sandstone cliffs. We then headed to Montrose via CO-145 with continuous sweepers that were so good, I was able to lock the cruise control on 100km/h and ride perfect radius

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Huntington Reservoir, Utah.



curves. Near Montrose, we visited the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park where spectacular sawtooth cliffs dropped 800m to the black-looking Gunnison River far below. We felt very small peering down into the canyon. During the spring snow melt, the flow of water through the narrow canyon is so powerful it carries metre-wide boulders with ease that smash into the walls. That's impressive. To get to the river's edge, we rode down the steep East Portal Road through hairpin bends with an overall grade of 16 per cent. That's not a typo: bloody steep! At the bottom, the narrow road ran between jagged cliffs beside the river where we had a picnic lunch.

In Montrose, we visited the Museum of the Mountain West with its many historic buildings including churches, schoolhouses, cabins and even an old carriage works, where wagons were repaired and "hotted up" back in the day. There was also a re-created town with a post office, various stores, pharmacy, doctor's surgery, dental surgery and even a mortician's office with all the gear used to embalm a body. What made the museum worth visiting were the half-million artefacts

on display. The frightening aspect was that some of the historic collection looked very familiar from our childhoods, especially the dental surgery equipped with a "new-fangled" electric drill.

One of our best rides was up and down CO-92 that commenced at Blue Mesa Dam, 60km from Montrose. The near-deserted road twisted its way between groves of golden aspens with nearly-continuous corners of 30-65km/h. At one stage, an oncoming rider gave us the "slow down" signal and when we came around a bend, there were five mule deer, with their distinctive large ears, on our side of the road. I slowed down, hit the horn and they scattered down the slope. Deer might look cute, but you don't want to hit one. Heading south on CO-145, we were in the San Juan Mountains and turned off into the ski town of Telluride. Located in a scenic box canyon and surrounded by steep mountains, Telluride is full of historic buildings from its days as a gold and silver mining town in the 1800s. We sat on the verandah of one of the many restaurants to have lunch and took in the view of a mountainside covered in autumn colours.

ROCKY MOUNTAINS

South of Telluride, CO-145 became Lizard Head Pass Road, one of the nicest rides in the majestic Rocky Mountains of Colorado. We tracked south from there to Farmington, New Mexico, then further south through lands of the Navajo Nation on New Mexico Highway 371 (NM-371) and reached our motel at Grants just before a torrential storm. These are called "monsoons" in New Mexico and the name is very appropriate. After a rainy night, the morning was overcast but dry as we rode on NM-23 past Enchanted Mesa to another 110m-high mesa that has the Acoma Pueblo on top. The village was built in the 1100s and its height and limited access afforded good protection against attacks by other Indian tribes. Spanish conquistadores arrived there in the 1500s and, following an attack on them in 1599, they executed 800 of the inhabitants and sent the rest into slavery after amputating the right feet of all males over 25. The Spanish built a mission church there in 1641 using Indian labour and it still stands. Acoma was a sombre place to visit.

From Grants, we headed south on a deserted NM-117 to the scenic El Malpais National Monument, run by the NPS, where we were the only visitors. Stopping later in the small town of Quemado (population 173), we met some visiting hunters as it was elk season. One elk that didn't get away had its head on the wall in the local cafe and we decided that taxidermists must do a roaring trade in this part of New Mexico. We stayed overnight in tiny Glenwood (population 54), where deer wandered around the houses, and from where we had a 90km ride to the Devil's Highway in neighbouring Arizona.

DEVIL'S HIGHWAY

Any road with devil in its name is usually worth riding and the Devil's Highway was no exception. It got its name because it was numbered US-666 when opened, but religious folk thought

Utah Highway 31.

Diva Amy Green
River, Utah.



Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Colorado.



Montrose, Colorado.



Telluride Main St, Colorado.



Old dental surgery.
Montrose, Colorado.



Colorado Highway 92.

Enchanted Mesa, New Mexico.



Salt River Canyon, Arizona.



San Xavier del Bac, Arizona.



it blasphemous to use the devil's number. It was changed to US-191, but everyone still calls it Devil's Highway or "Route 666", not least because of the number of fatalities on it. It starts in the largest copper mine in the USA at Morenci and we rode through the mine under conveyor belts, through tunnels and next to excavations. Enormous Caterpillar dump trucks demanded immediate respect lest we ended up as a speed bump under one of their giant wheels.

Leaving the mine, we were into the switchbacks, the majority with advisory speeds of 10mph; that's 16km/h in our money. Depending on which websites you read, the road has 420-450 bends along its route through the wilderness of the Apache National Forest and the majority were in the first 105km where we climbed 1500m in elevation. It was corner after corner with countless switchbacks, most with no guard rails, and the road was narrow in places. After we reached the top of the range, the tight bends stopped and the final stretch into Alpine was full of lovely sweepers where we could relax and take in the scenery.

Further west, we had a great ride south on US-60 through Pinon and Juniper forests, then down the S-bends to the Salt River Canyon before arriving in Globe. We visited the Besh-Ba-Gowah Archaeological

Park there, where Salado Indians began constructing a pueblo in 1225 AD. Much of it was two-storey with about 200 rooms built with rocks, tree trunks and mud, all carted by the Salado and manhandled into place. A few buildings have been reconstructed to show the layout of rooms and implements used. The pueblo was abandoned in the 1400s and then reoccupied by the Apache in the 1600s.

Not far from Globe were the ruins of cliff dwellings at Tonto National Monument. From the NPS visitor centre, we walked 800m up a steep hill on a good path through Saguaro cactus to reach the ruins of two-storey dwellings with about 20 rooms. The Salado built the structures in the 1300s and the location in a cliff overhang protected them from attack and inclement weather. Having to climb down the hill to a creek and then carry water back up in a pottery jug wouldn't have been fun. It was a very interesting place to visit. Leaving the ruins, we rode across the picturesque Roosevelt Lake Bridge before returning to Globe and heading south to Tucson.

THE SPANISH INFLUENCE AND AN ICBM

The influence of the Spanish is everywhere in Arizona, especially their churches. South of

Tucson, we visited the ornate San Xavier del Bac Mission Church, built in 1797 and known as the "White Dove of the Desert". The inside of this still-active church was decorated with religious frescoes painted in bright colours and all the columns, figurines and statues were carved in wood. It was very intricate work. The church is considered one of the best examples of Spanish colonial architecture in the USA and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Just a few kilometres away was a National Historic Landmark. The Titan Missile Silo is the last remaining underground launch silo of the original 54 missile sites from the Cold War years of 1963-1987. Inside the silo was a huge Titan II intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a dummy warhead. It was the largest ICBM ever deployed by the US and could deliver a nine-megaton thermonuclear warhead 10,000km away. Our guide who took us around the 45m-deep underground silo with its 3m-thick, hardened concrete walls was a retired US Air Force member who had served in a Titan II silo during the Cold War when the philosophy was "Mutually Assured Destruction". The tour was fascinating.

On the return leg through California, we visited Joshua Tree National Park and rode south to north on a smooth asphalt road

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Joshua Tree NP, California.



Sea Lions. Morro Bay, California.



Pacific Coast Highway, California.



through a desert landscape of Joshua trees, cactus and huge granite rocks. Joshua trees were named by Mormon pioneers in the 1800s, who thought they resembled the biblical Joshua praying to God. We spent a second day in the 3200sq km park riding its excellent roads and enjoying its unique beauty. At one stop, we watched an NPS rescue team training on some rocks as the park is very popular with climbers. We put it on our list for a return visit.

We headed to Bakersfield in central California, then followed CA-58 west to Santa Margarita before climbing over the Santa Lucia Mountain Range to the coast at scenic Morro Bay. There were lots of sea lions there and we

could hear them barking that night. Next day we rode up California Highway 1, the "Pacific Coast Highway", to Big Sur and Carmel. The road has been cut into the base of steep hillsides on top of the coastal cliffs and many sections had no guard rails and steep drop-offs to the rocks and beaches below. Thick fog can sometimes roll in, but we were blessed with a sunny day and just a light sea mist. The twisting road and rugged scenery have made the Pacific Coast Highway a bucket-list ride and it certainly lived up to its reputation. The coast-hugging road was a gem.

At Carmel-by-the-Sea, a town made famous by having Clint Eastwood as its mayor on two occasions, we turned inland and headed

into San Francisco. We had ridden just under 7000km and, when I filled in the last section on the map, it showed a squiggly loop from California through Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and back to California. Our route had taken us through mountains, forests, deserts, even a copper mine, and finally along the Pacific coast. There's plenty to see in the USA and we'd had a good look around. **ARR**



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THE LAST RIDE

Two mates in what could
be their last ride together...

BY IAN NEUBAUER

This is not a story about motorbikes. Nor is it a story about exploring a beautiful and remote part of the world. It's a story about friendship underpinned by the love of motorbikes that has spanned decades, crossed continents, seen dizzying heights and survived demoralising lows.

I first met Nazario Salvador, a Spanish copper, in East Timor in 2009. He was at the tail end of a seven-year mission as an anti-corruption investigator with the Australian Federal Police, whereas I had flown to East Timor on a whim after losing my job as a news reporter in Sydney in a bid to kickstart a new career as a freelance moto and travel writer.

Naz and I were introduced by a mutual friend from Australia and hit it off instantaneously. He had a big old KTM 640 Adventure and was a fountain of knowledge about adventure riding in East Timor. He told me it was not possible to hire a motorbike there, but after hearing about my mission he offered to lend me his second bike, a beat-up Kwaka 650 KLR, and took me on a three-day

tour of the war-torn half-island state. My ride report on East Timor, "Danger Zone", was later published in *Australian Road Rider*.

Fast-forward five years, to 2014. My career was back on track and then some. I was staying at a luxury clifftop villa in Bali (a perk of the job) when I discovered through Facebook that Naz was also on the island. It was a perfect opportunity to repay the hospitality he had given me in East Timor and I invited him to join me. We spent the next few days lounging around the pool, watching sci-fi movies in the villa's private cinema, and ordering gourmet cheeseburgers from the in-house chef.

Another eight years passed until I saw Naz again when, after learning I was on my way to Romania, he jumped on a plane to join me on a 10-day blurt around the country. When the pandemic wound down he repeated the trick, this time flying all the way to Sulawesi in northern Indonesia for a month-long ride through the spider-shaped island. International tourists in Sulawesi are few and far between and it would've been a lonely and somewhat uneventful ride on my own. But





with Naz by my side, it was fart jokes all the way and we had the ride of our lives.

But the times are a-changing. Naz is now retired and about to become a grandfather. He wants to spend quality time with the bubba — a right that was denied to him when his son was born by his quarrelsome ex-wife. I'm in a similar boat, having finally found my soulmate at age 50, and am planning on settling down. But before we hung up our riding boots for good, we hitched a plan for one last ride: a 1500km sprint from Indonesia's capital Jakarta to the great lakes of Sumatra, the largest island fully within Indonesian territory and the sixth-largest island in the world.

But things didn't exactly get off to a good start.

LATE ARRIVALS AND A COLD...

The air conditioning on my flight to Jakarta had been set to sub-arctic freeze and I caught the death of a cold. My bike, a KTM 250 Adventure, that I shipped over from Bali where I now live arrived a day late, while the KTM I'd hired for Naz fell through at the eleventh hour. Instead, he had to settle for a Suzuki V-Strom 250SX that broke down on the first day thanks to a dodgy clutch cable. It was an easy fix, but riding to the nearest mechanic in first gear was about as much fun as a Covid lockdown.

Then there was the rain. Despite planning the trip for Indonesia's dry season (as opposed to the wet or monsoon season that runs from December to June), it was raining cats and dogs as we fought our way through the satanic traffic of Jakarta. The skies cleared during the two-hour ferry crossing from the island of Java to Sumatra, but returned with a vengeance the following day. We spent most of the day trapped in a log cabin at the Way Kambas National Park, an elephant sanctuary in South Sumatra.

We only managed to get in about two hours of riding on Day 3 before the mother of all tropical storms unleashed a downpour so fast and furious that we could barely hear



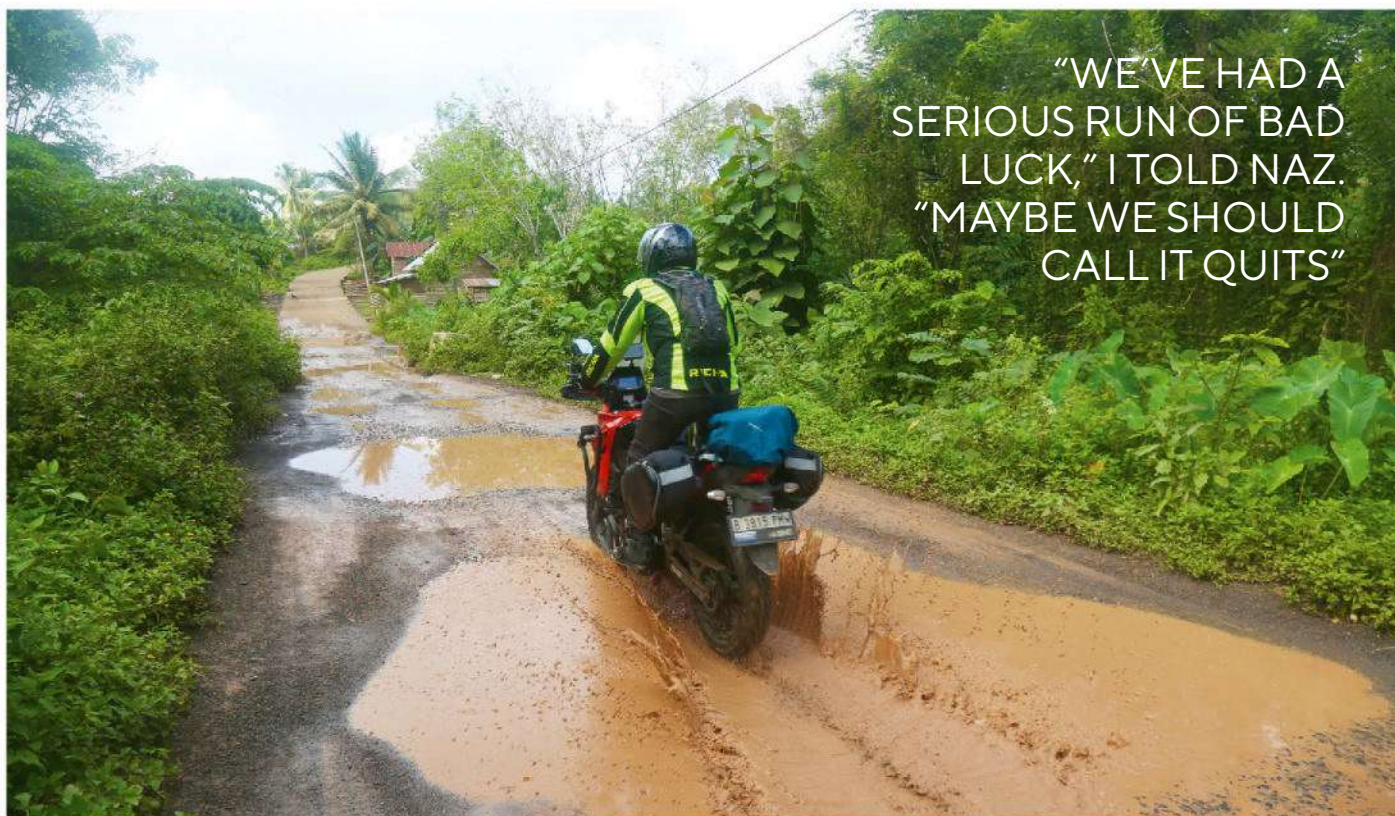
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each other talk under the corrugated iron roof where we'd found shelter. We spent five or six hours there, praying for the rain to end until, in a fit of desperation, we hightailed it through a foot of water at night to the nearest hotel. But the hotel was full and no matter how much we begged, the manager refused to let us crash in the hallway. We ended up sleeping rough in an abandoned hut on the side of the road. My cold got worse, I couldn't stop sneezing, and Naz caught a cold, too.

Then there was the traffic. The potholed arterial roads in South Sumatra are generally only two lanes wide and riddled with armies of slow-moving, smoke-belching trucks that overtake even slower-moving trucks without a care in the world for smaller vehicles coming in the opposite direction. More than 28,000

people die on Indonesian roads every year, with arterial roads having the highest death rate per kilometre. Add cheap hotels infested with bed bugs, and repetitive unappetising meals consisting mostly of mystery meat and cold clumpy rice, and you begin to get a picture of the mood I was in.

After four days of the same crap, I'd just about had enough. "We've had a serious run of bad luck," I told Naz. "Maybe we should call it quits."

TOUGH TIMES

While Naz was posted in Spain's restive Basque region in the late 1980s, terrorists detonated a bomb under his squad car. He survived but was left with ghastly scars and lost years of his life going in and out of

hospitals. But the experience made him hard as steel and nothing much that happens in life fazes him now. "Ian," he said. "It's just part of a process. In life, you have to get through bad times to reach the good."

"I know. But these roads are too dangerous. It's only a matter of time until one of us ends up under a truck."

"Then go home," he blurted. "You don't owe me anything. I can continue on my own."

A real friend is not someone who shouts you beers at the pub and tells you what a great bloke you are. A real friend is a guy who kicks you in the butt when you are being a dick. Naz's ultimatum was a textbook example and the wake-up call I needed. "No way," I replied. "I'm not going to let you have all the fun on your own. Let's ride. But not on this bloody road."



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A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

After studying the map, we ditched the arterial road leading north and headed west towards the Barisan Mountains, a 1700km-long mountain range with 35 active volcanoes that means “row of hills” in the Malay language. Soon the road narrowed and broke up in parts, replaced by a dirt track edged by thick green jungle and lined with muddy ruts. Nearly 140 years have passed since Gottlieb Daimler and Wilhelm Maybach invented the world’s first internal-combustion petrol motorbike. But never in this time has a rider been as happy as I was that day to find themselves knee-deep in muddy ruts. It signalled the end to the Mad Max trucks that had dogged us since Jakarta. And with my attitude adjusted, the weather magically cleared up.

Late that afternoon we reached the city of Lubuklinggau, where we checked into a luxury hotel that not only had hot water, but clean beds and a rooftop pool. Our dinner that evening was also special: KFC. The Indonesian

version is even oilier and stuffed with more chemicals than the KFC in Oz, but offered a welcome respite to our mystery meat-rice diet. We knocked back 10 zinger burgers and a kilo of fries between us!

In the morning we followed a serpentine road up the foothills of the Barisan Mountains, with a half-hour detour to a natural rock pool overlooking a waterfall for a cooling swim. From the town of Bangko, where we stopped for lunch — goat satay sticks drenched in a motor oil sauce — our route took us deep into the highlands of Sumatra along an empty, patchy, asphalt road. Giant ferns dangled overhead as we zoomed along the edge of river valleys, crossing rickety old meccano bridges and parting the muddy waters of potholes as big as cars. Elephants frequent these parts, according to road signs we passed, though the only animals we saw were long-tailed macaques, a thieving species of monkey with a disposition for pinching shiny objects like sunglasses and mobile phones. The scenery was so beautiful

that on a few occasions we just stopped, got off our bikes and gazed, speechless, at the misty mountains and white-water views. But with daylight fading, we had to pick up the pace, pulling off peg-threatening leans on shiny wet roads, the kind of effortless riding only successive days of motorbiking can engender.

LAKES AND A VOLCANO

The sun had already set when we reached Kerinchi Lake, the first of five great lakes we would visit on our journey. There we made a beeline for the only hotel in town: a decrepit set of bungalows furnished with rock-hard mattresses and bright-red bedspreads that reminded me of the terror-filled paintings of Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch. The

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bathroom was mouldy and smelled like blue cheese — I preferred to relieve myself in the trees. We donated our dinner — a couple of takeaway packets of bone-dry refried chicken drumsticks — to a litter of puppies living under our bungalow. We were dirty, hungry, smelly and tired, but too high from the ride to give a flying fuck, making wolf calls in the fresh mountain air as we knocked back a six-pack of lukewarm beers Naz had acquired at great expense at the hotel in Lubuklinguu.

Most Sumatrans are devout Muslims and do not drink alcohol, but we infidels are partial to a tipple. “It doesn’t get any better,” Naz remarked. “Too right,” I said, farting loudly.

The following day we continued north, taking in 300km of twisty, winding, broken mountain roads that curled around vast tea and cinnamon plantations. The scenery was already Insta-worthy enough but went up 1000 notches on the Richter scale as we turned a corner to see a blue giant, Mount Kerinci, sitting on the horizon,

circled by clouds. At 3805m, it’s the tallest volcano in the Barisan Mountains and the third tallest in Indonesia, which has more volcanoes than any country on earth. Mount Kerinci also marks the border of South Sumatra and West Sumatra provinces, home of the Minangkabau people and Minangkabau architecture, a unique building style featuring dramatic curved roofs with multitiered, upswept gables.

West Sumatra is also famous in Indonesia for Padang cuisine, a cooking style named after





the provincial capital Padang, in which protein is reduced in coconut milk laced with an orgy of herbs and spices. We sample it for the first time in the highland town of Pastalang, at a Padang roadhouse specialising in rendang, a buffalo meat curry-stew laced with chilli, ginger, turmeric and cinnamon. It was spicy one moment, then tangy, and sweet and sour the next, a psychedelic ping-pong of flavours and one of the most delicious curries I've ever had.

From Pastalang the road climbed even higher into the Barisan Mountains, through dreamlike cloudy plains carpeted with emerald-green rice fields and harrowing switchbacks, with many sections that crumbled down cliffs. At dusk, we hit the twin lakes of Diatas and Dibawah, which sit at 1531m above sea level.

ON TO PARIS...

Our hotel room was cold and clammy and neither of us got much sleep. The moment the sun rose over the shimmering lakes we hightailed it out of there, descending 1000m into the hot and sticky Solok Valley. An hour



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"THE SCENERY WAS ALREADY
INSTA-WORTHY ENOUGH BUT
WENT UP 1000 NOTCHES"





or so later we marched uphill again, this time to Bukittinggi, a 19th-century Dutch hilltop station known as the “Parjis van Sumatera” (Paris of Sumatra) during Indonesia’s colonial period for its striking whitewashed colonial buildings and iconic clock tower.

After stopping for lunch at Padang restaurant in Bukittinggi, where we swallowed a spectacular yellow fish curry paired with a water spinach salad, curried eggs, dried banana with chilli paste and potato cakes, we set off on the last leg of our ride into the Sianok Valley. Cut straight out of Jurassic Park, this valley is pockmarked with limestone rock formations that rise dramatically from the ground like giant pieces of chess. After that, the road dropped like a bomb down a series

of switchbacks to the shore of Lake Maninjau, the largest caldera lake in West Sumatra and the northernmost point of our trip.

It had taken us nine days to cover 1500km. The plan was to stay here for three or four days, chilling, swimming, catching up on lost rest, and ship our motorbikes back to Jakarta. But after studying the map, I devised a different return journey: a sprint along Sumatra’s wild west coast, a place of rustic fishing villages locked in time, long empty beaches and coastal mountains.

“What’ya reckon?” I asked Naz. “Want to ride the lost coast? It’s not going to be an easy ride. I don’t even know if there are any hotels there.”

The crazy Spaniard looked at me and smiled. **ARR**

DIY

Riple, a motorbike rental outfit in Jakarta, has a fleet of late-model KTMs, a few Harleys plus Japanese road and adventure bikes. Naz’s V-Strom cost him 10 million rupias, around \$900, for a month. Their website (riple.co.id) is in Indonesian but you can send them text messages in English at +62 812-1021-9726 using WhatsApp.



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<https://links.roadrider.com.au/LastRideNeubauer>

URBAN MUSCLE

Yamaha's middle-weight contender
gets a makeover

WORDS PHIL JAMES. PHOTOS NIGEL PATERSON





A sporty, affordable naked which handles fine.

Yamaha's MT-09 has been a crowd favourite for ages. One reason for its eternal appeal is Yamaha's policy of regular upgrades to keep it relevant, and so it is with the MY 2024 bike. It's easy to spot the new machine with its unmistakable styling change to the headlight nacelle and bodywork, but the real change is an upgrade to the electronic package, now featuring an R1-derived six axis IMU.

The outgoing model already had a good package with variable traction, wheelie and slide control. The latest incarnation improves again by offering rear-wheel back slip regulation (BSR), two fully customisable ride modes, a 5-inch TFT colour dash screen, and new software to control taking advantage of the IMU upgrade to offer finer control of all parameters. Car park hooning has never been easier.

Complete Phone connectivity is now included. Using Yamaha's My Ride app, full telephony is supported, as is an audio player, weather information, phone notifications and an automatic clock update. GPS navigation is available using Garmin's StreetCross app (it does require the creation of an account with Garmin).

To improve functionality, there's a new left-side switch block with scrolling arrows to assist with menu navigation. From the

"did we really need it department" comes indicators with dual-mode operation. There are separate buttons for each side. A light press will initiate a three-flash sequence, while a hard press keeps them on until they auto cancel 150m past the turn. Riders can manually cancel them by pressing the same button again if needed. The system worked as advertised and the editor even got to like

it somewhat, but the difference in pressure between light touch for the three-flash "lane change" mode (as we called it) versus the harder press (stay on) mode takes some getting used to.

A welcome upgrade to any bike is cruise control, and Yamaha has fitted it for the first time on the standard MT-09 (the SP version had cruise in the past).



Also available in black.





"ONCE UNDERWAY, THE MOTOR IMPRESSES WITH ITS BROAD SPREAD OF ACCESSIBLE POWER"

They've also changed the bike's bodywork and ergonomics to facilitate easier rider movement during aggressive engagements. A more compact feel to the machine is another benefit. Otherwise, all the basic stuff riders love about the MT-09 remains largely unchanged. The engine, frame, suspension and spin forged wheels carry over from the old model.

THE PACKAGE

The MT-09 is an accessible yet punchy naked bike using Yamaha's CP3 890cc triple. It's an engine that's been around for a while and is well regarded for its compact size and low centre of gravity. The relatively moderate peak power output results from focusing on usable midrange performance, rather than chucking all the go into the last few thousand rpm. That would have produced more impressive figures... with far less usability. Displays of such common design sense always impress at *ARR*.

Performance is also helped by the bike's weight, which is 15-20kg lighter than most open-class bikes. This is achieved in part by



using aluminium for the frame, swingarm, triple clamps, subframe and rear brake lever, and only having three cylinders. Brakes have a Brembo radial master cylinder. The MT-09 isn't a budget build by any means, yet Yamaha persists with cheap and difficult-to-use straight tyre valve stems. The front valve is especially annoying.

Ergonomically it feels a bit like a supermoto'd dirt bike with a narrow cross

section and flat, wide bars. Weather protection is almost non-existent, adding to the compact feel from the rider's saddle. All levers are position adjustable and riders of all sizes should be able to find a setup that works for them.

THE RIDE

It's unlikely anyone will be intimidated when sitting on an MT-09; it just feels friendly... a

SHAD

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INNER
MESH PANEL



OPTIONAL
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nice place to be. Once underway, the motor impresses with its broad spread of accessible power. Yamaha talks up the induction noise and for a well-muffled machine, it offers some aural excitement. As with other CP3-engine'd bikes we've ridden, gear whine between 80 to 100km/h can be quite loud in certain conditions (tail wind and moderate acceleration) but most owners don't seem fazed by it.

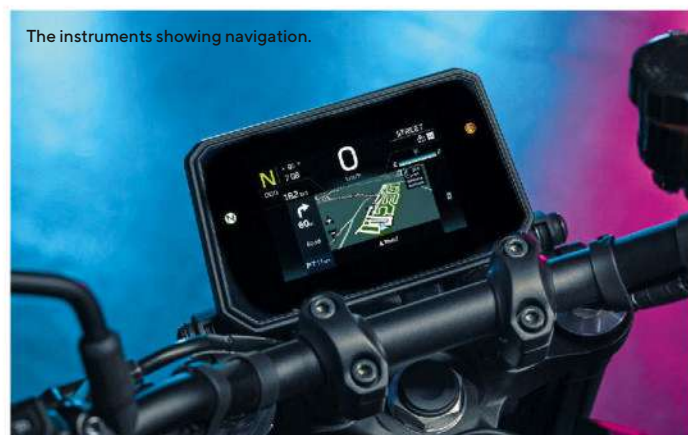
The CP3's fuelling is exceptional. Let me explain. As emissions regulations tighten, consistent smooth fuelling is becoming more difficult to achieve, particularly through the

on/off throttle transition, where zero throttle fuel chop often produces an abrupt initial throttle response. It's annoying as it's not going to save the planet, but it does make motorcycles more dangerous (especially in slippery conditions). The MT-09, however, shows none of this behaviour with predictable engine response in all conditions. Impressive.

There are three power modes and they work as expected. Rain is good in congested traffic. Street has enough punch for 99 per cent of situations and importantly, Sport isn't unusually sharp. If conditions are right, and the

traffic light, Sport mode turns the MT-09 into a very exciting motorcycle (especially if the Lift Control System is set to position 1).

The gearbox can be a bit clunky. We won't mark it down because using it in a conventional way with manual clutching is fine. We also won't be nominating it for the best gearbox of 2024 as others are better. Where this is relevant is during quickshift operations. Quickshift up is smooth and slick 95 per cent of the time, quickshift down less so. The electronic throttle blipping is fine, it's just that its good work is often undermined by



The instruments showing navigation.



Intake ports provide a nice induction roar.



the transmission's clunky nature, resulting in an unpleasantly rough downshift.

Yamaha's new approach to indicator control will take some time to get used to. I kept going for the gap between the buttons with my thumb (where the conventional switch would live). The self-cancelling function does work... eventually. Best to think of it as a backup feature if the rider forgets to cancel them manually.

The suspension is fully adjustable except for shock compression rate, and it's a stiff setup. For lighter riders like me, it's very stiff (our tall, overweight editor wasn't as critical). Even with preload and damping on minimum, it remains very firm, providing a lot of chassis support during aggressive rider inputs. The downside is a tiring ride on bumpy roads at speed. Changing suspension settings was quick and easy, apart from the need to remove a frame plug to access shock rebound adjustment. The tool kit includes an appropriate C-Spanner for shock preload adjustment (well done Yamaha).

The chassis provides very stable steering. Please indulge me for a moment to work through this. While the wheelbase is a short 1430mm, and caster angle typical for the class, 24.4 degrees, the trail figure of 108mm on the



other hand is... longish. Overall, it's slightly sharper geometry than the outgoing model (0.6 degrees steeper caster and 1mm less trail). However, a noticeable amount of weight remains in the steering, making the bike feel less agile than it is. It will rip through tight corners with aplomb but... it takes more heft on the steering than expected for a relatively light, short machine. This may be off-putting until the owner gets used to it.

The brakes are standard Yamaha fare except for a Brembo radial master cylinder. This inclusion is welcome, and we can report the brakes are very good. Hard, controlled stops are easy, with lever feedback being top notch. The ABS offers both basic and the more advanced cornering ABS options. We just left it in cornering ABS mode, so panic stops don't require any thought. Just pull the lever hard and steer the bike away from danger.

Aprilia Tuono 660



Triumph 765R



KTM 990 DUKE



Kawasaki Z900



CFMOTO 800NK Advanced



COMPETITION

Aprilia Tuono 660, \$22,600 Ride Away

A smaller engine wrapped in a sophisticated chassis and an electronic package on the same level as the MT-09. A fun motorcycle with overall performance in the same league as the MT. Its biggest issue is the asking price and as we go to press, Aprilia is offering solid discounts to address that.

CFMOTO 800NK Advanced, \$11,490 Ride Away

A smidgeon less performance without the IMU-supported chassis electronics. Besides that, it's very well equipped and \$6000 cheaper than its peers. We've not ridden it, but what we can say is... no CFMOTO we've ridden has disappointed, and it's got a three-year warranty.

KTM 990 DUKE, \$20,090 Ride Away

The third incarnation of the mid-size, twin-cylinder Duke. Although it's in the same size and weight class as the MT, it's a class above with more of everything... for more money.

Triumph 765R, \$18,390 Ride Away

Moto 2 uses a variant of this engine. It's a cracker too, making it a true mini hyper-naked bike. The chassis electronics are on par with the Yamaha, and we think this is the MT-09's sharpest competitor.

Kawasaki Z900, \$14,227 + government charges: \$15,556 Ride Away (Sydney)

Four pots instead of three, but otherwise this bike goes head-to-head with the MT-09. A little behind on some tech and features — there's no cruise control, for example — but it's cheaper.



Phone connectivity and control.



Cruise control is now standard.



The CP3 inline triple.



Adjustable Brembo brake lever.



SPECIFICATIONS

2024 YAMAHA MT-09

ENGINE

Liquid-cooled, 4-stroke, DOHC, 4-valve, 3-cylinder

Power: 87.5kW, 117hp at 10,000rpm (UK model, AU not given)

Torque: 93Nm at 7000rpm (UK model, AU not given)

Capacity: 890cc

Bore x stroke: 78 x 62.1mm

Compression ratio: 11.5:1

Fuel system: Fuel injection

Ignition: Digital

TRANSMISSION

Type: 6 Speed

Final drive: Chain

Clutch: Wet multiplate, assist and slipper function

CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR

Chassis: Aluminium

Swingarm: Aluminium

Front suspension: 41mm upside-down fork, compression, rebound, spring preload adjustment, 130mm travel

Rear suspension: Linkage shock with rebound and preload adjustment, 117mm travel

Front brakes: Radial-mount monobloc 4-piston callipers, semi-floating 298mm dual discs, ABS

Rear brake: Single-piston calliper, 245mm single disc, ABS

Tyres: Front: 120/70ZR17 (58W); Rear: 180/55ZR17M/C (73W)

ELECTRONIC RIDER AIDS

Brake control (ABS): 2 modes (one with cornering assist)

Riding modes: 5 modes, 2 customisable (Rider)

Engine power modes: 4 modes

Inertial measurement unit: Yes

Traction control: 3 levels

Wheelie control: 3 levels

Back slip regulation: Yes

Slide control: 3 Levels

Cornering assist: No

Engine brake control: No

Emergency stop signalling brake light: Yes

Quickshifter: Yes, bi-directional, can be disabled

Cruise control: Yes

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Rake: 24.4°

Trail: 108mm

Claimed dry weight: Not given

Claimed wet weight: 193kg

Ground clearance: 140mm

Seat height: 825mm

Wheelbase: 1430mm

Fuel capacity: 14L

Length: 2090mm

Width: 820mm

Height: 1145mm

ETCETERA

Price: \$17,399 Ride Away

Colours: Midnight Cyan, Icon Blue, Tech Black

Test bike supplied by Yamaha Australia

URL: https://links.roadrider.com.au/Yam_MT09-24

Warranty: 2 years, unlimited kilometres



More info from
Yamaha.

[links.roadrider.com.au/
Yam_MT09-24](https://links.roadrider.com.au/Yam_MT09-24)



The bike's OEM tyres are Bridgestone Battlax Hypersport S23Rs. We tested the bike in the middle of winter (below 15 degrees) and found these tyres weren't great in cold conditions, to the point where some riders' confidence will be dented when pushing on. The tyres are probably fine in summer.

Like most modern naked bike designs, the MT-09 doesn't subject its rider to excessive windblast at motorway speeds. The front cowling (such as it is) and radiator shrouds deflect just enough air from the rider to make 110km/h speeds tolerable for a reasonable period. Speeds exceeding that will quickly drain the rider's resolve to continue pushing the speedo number up... and in some ways that's a good thing. The rider will also feel the full impact of cold air in winter.

As delivered, the MT-09 is a backpack bike with no tie-down hooks. Yamaha does offer luggage solutions in the accessory catalogue. The accessory range is quite good (although, in our experience, availability can be an issue). Apart from bling, there are adjustable footpeg assemblies, flyscreen options for improved highway comfort, and some very tasty (although not cheap) Akrapovic exhausts. It wouldn't be hard to push the ride-away price of this bike into the mid-20s with a selection of OEM accessories.

CONCLUSION

We've formed the view that the MT-09 is a very effective weapon for the price. We also think it's primarily a city machine. In this environment, the compact size, short

"...A VERY EFFECTIVE WEAPON FOR THE PRICE"

wheelbase and tight steering lock really impress. In the urban environment, the stiff springing isn't an issue with fewer sharp-edged bumps around, and they're taken at lower speeds anyway. Darting through the tin tops and around a carpark is easy and this shortens travel times.

Out on the open road it still works, but the firm suspension isn't ideal, compromising grip on rough Australian rural roads... as well as flogging the rider. In winter it is a very cold place to be, offset by being glorious in summer (by comparison to fully faired machines). Carefully chosen accessories and respringing would improve its long-distance ability... if an owner was willing to spend the additional amount (and really, if that's what you're after, buy the Tracer 9, which uses the same engine).

As far as naked bikes go, in every way the MT-09 sits in the sensible centre. Price wise, performance wise, number of cylinders, weight, ease of handling, insurance and running costs... it's all in the middle, between high-priced exotics and budget busters. For that reason alone, it's an appealing option for riders looking for genuine performance without spending a fortune. **ARR**



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<https://links.roadrider.com.au/MT09-181>

INDIAN STEPS IT UP

New engines, new performance and traditional style do the Indian brand proud

BY PHIL JAMES





The sportiest of the lot – Scout 101.



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Scout Classic Sunset Red.

The Indian Scout has carved out a solid niche for itself in the cruiser market. Its continued success is vital to Indian's future, so getting a new version right matters. To increase desirability, the essentially all-new machine has more performance, more comfort, more user friendliness, yet maintains its classic style (using design cues going back to the original Scout). Indian is aware its fans want an Indian to be recognisable... as an Indian.

The one-day Scout launch was held in the Gold Coast hinterland and offered everything from motorway to mountainous backroads. There are five variants of Scout and we had the opportunity for a brief run on each, so comments here are very much first impressions.

It was immediately evident the Scout is more than an entry point machine (delivering a stripped-down experience for a stripped-down price). They aren't trying to be miniature versions of the big bikes specifically targeted at ladies and new riders. Each variant brings its own strengths to the table, offering an alternative to the larger machines, with strong appeal to any rider drawn towards the American motorcycle experience.

All bikes use the same engine, frame and fuel tank, with Indian fitting different bars, wheels, suspension, seats and accessories to create five distinct cruising styles. From the tribute-to-the-past Classic to the extended-performance Scout 101, there should be something for all tastes. Of the other models, longer-distance riders will be drawn to the Super Scout, while



those finding the range-topping 101 hot rod is out of their budget can go for the Sport. Finally, the Bagger has the enduring appeal that comes with a slammed stance.

The 101 and Super Scout come with a fully featured TFT display, three riding modes and keyless fob. This upgrade can be had on the Classic, Sport and Bobber models as an extra called Limited + Tech Trim. The package also features unique colours on these models.

Indian says rider confidence was a key design parameter and the company has delivered on that. The friendly engine and effective chassis design come together delivering an easy cruiser experience. The significant dynamic limitations often typical of this genre just aren't there.

Customisation is a fundamental part of the American motorcycle experience and Indian has

"...FRIENDLY ENGINE AND EFFECTIVE CHASSIS..."

used a steel chassis that's easily modified (for people who create their artwork with a welder). The base bikes are fully upgradable spec wise (if an owner wants to do it later), and the accessory catalogue is large. Individualisation is easy; it's unlikely any two scouts will be the same.

RIDE IMPRESSIONS

All Scouts offer a foot-forward American cruiser experience, with mid-mount foot controls an option. Cruiser ergonomics can be tiring when not well tailored to an

SCOUT CMFG DESIGN PROCESS



SCOUT FINAL DESIGN PROCESS



individual's body. To address this, Indian is offering more than 30 ergo set-ups to help owners nail it fit wise. This is bound to steer buyers in their direction.

A great bike needs a great engine and Indian's new motor is a great engine. Smooth at all reasonable riding speeds, slick gearbox, light clutch and... easily removed cam covers (mechanics will love it). Over 4500rpm it is less smooth, and this can be felt with hard acceleration, but it won't deter riders from exploring the bike's performance potential. Impressively, for a largish twin, it happily accelerates from below 2000rpm in sixth gear.

Although well muffled, the engine does sound good to the rider, both on and off throttle. I guess that's the best we can hope for in the modern world. Viewed in profile, the muffler looks fine, but viewed from behind, the true horror of emission compliance can be seen. It protrudes a long way from the bike and

limits ground clearance on the right. Perhaps taking the Triumph route of using a hidden muffler under the bike would have reduced it to a visually more pleasing size and allowed increased lean angle. Indian claims 33 degrees so it has enough to cope with most situations.

The suspension package works well on our bumpy blacktop. It is surprisingly compliant yet keeps the chassis under control and is well suited to the American cruising experience. The 101 scores higher spec suspension and likely much better when correctly set up, however at a launch event that isn't doable ... so we can only surmise. Regardless, the other models have suspension that's fit-for-purpose and a solid improvement over the outgoing model.

Interestingly, I found my initial impression of the Sport Scout was just as favourable as the higher-spec 101. I'm sure if I punted them back-to-back along my test loop, the 101 would come out in front. However, the

THE INDIAN ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

History tells us the original Indian Motorcycle Company died in the mid-1950s. And as much as we might miss it, as we all know... resurrecting the dead is difficult. In cases like this, the best that can be done is document history and preserve a few relics, keeping the memories of better times alive. Unless you happen to be passionate and have very deep pockets... enter Polaris, which appears to have both passion and money.

Despite this, there's usually a big stumbling block when attempting resurrection. It involves the views of purists. They run an argument along the lines of, "The only real Indians were made before 1953 in Springfield Massachusetts", following up with comments like, "Anything after that is an imposter, cashing in on the legend." We think that's wrong thinking and here's why.

Ask the question: why would a company that made its name and fortune in the snowmobile and ATV business start manufacturing motorcycles? Well, it wouldn't do it because it's easy or a way to make a quick buck! The company would have taken it on as a passion project. Yes, of course it would need to make a profit eventually, but there are easier (and less risky) ways to get a return on capital than making motorcycles.

The business's success to date, first with Victory, then Indian, proves Polaris management and staff are passionate motorcycle people. That's critical to bringing back a brand... as Royal Enfield and Triumph have shown brilliantly.

Furthermore, after meeting the Indian International vice-president, Grant Bester, and the Australian Indian team, there's no doubt in my mind that the passion for the brand and its heritage runs deep within Polaris. Fans of the first Indians should rejoice in this; it means they aren't forever stuck in the past and can have a thoroughly modern Indian if they so choose.

So, after a bit of deep thinking, here at *ARR* we reckon a Polaris Indian is every bit as much an Indian... as an Indian, Indian!

Phil enjoying the twisties in Queensland.



"THE 101 SCORES HIGHER-SPEC SUSPENSION..."

Sport Scout isn't as far behind as its lower spec suggests (at sensible speeds). It may be a better value buy for those wanting to go in that direction.

The brakes are fine on all models, and I was expecting a bit of a limitation there, so that's excellent work on Indian's part. The single-disc bikes don't require gorilla hand strength for a quick stop. The 101's twin-disc performance brakes equal pretty much anything else out there on public roads (even though it has a lot of mass to stop).

Both 101 and Sport run a low-profile, 19-inch front tyre and this improves steering precision and dynamics. It must be remembered this is dynamic in cruiser terms. We're pleased to report they don't scrape until lean angles have exceeded the edge of the usual cruiser envelope. These bikes effectively extend the limit of dynamic cruiser fun... but they're still cruisers.

Surprisingly, the other models with their 16-inch high-profile tyres still tip into corners quite well. Those high-profile tyres also improve bump compliance. Both wheel combinations suit each model's intended role.

The ability to steer well shouldn't be a surprise, as the geometry (identical on all models) is relatively conservative. As a



comparison (and it's an apples and oranges comparison) ... it's quite close to BMW's R 12, the German company's new heritage model cruiser. The BMW is a little shorter in the wheelbase but has 10mm less trail, which points to why the Scout handles less like the slow-steering supertankers many older cruisers emulated and modern naked. Whatever you've been riding you won't find the Scout to be totally alien, which is another reason why it's a great entry machine to the American cruising experience.

Both the Classic and Super Scouts appear to be the most practical options as everyday bikes. The Classic, with its full-size fenders (that work) particularly impressed me. The Super Scout,

with its screen and standard smallish panniers, should be quite adept at light touring, making it the better option for many.

The Bobber, with its hot rod styling, will appeal to those looking for strong road presence and who are prepared to accept less suspension compliance to get it.

LIMITATIONS

Unusually, I'm not going to benchmark this bike against other American-style machines. It's capable enough to hold its own in most motorcycling situations against mainstream bikes and that's how I evaluated it. However, there are impacts that come with the traditional American approach to

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SCOUT DESIGN PROCESS



A clay mock-up is one of the last steps in the design process.



Scout Bobber Bronze Metallic.



SPECIFICATIONS

SCOUT CLASSIC (OTHER MODELS VARY)

ENGINE

Type: Liquid-cooled V-Twin (60 degrees)

Capacity: 1250cc

Compression ratio: 12.5:1

Engine management: Closed-loop fuel injection / 63mm bore

PERFORMANCE

Claimed maximum power: 105hp / 79kW @ 6300rpm

Claimed maximum torque: 108Nm

TRANSMISSION

Type: 6-speed

Final drive: Toothed belt

Clutch: Wet, multi-plate

CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR

Chassis: Steel

Front suspension: Telescopic Fork / 120mm of travel

Rear suspension: Dual shocks / 76mm of travel

Front brakes: Single / 298mm semi-floating rotor / 2-piston calliper

Rear brake: Single / 298mm semi-floating rotor / 1-piston calliper

Tyres F: 130/90B16 72H; **R:** 150/80B16 71H

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Rake: 29°

Trail: 122.2mm

Claimed wet weight: 252kg

Seat height: 680mm

Wheelbase: 1562mm

Fuel capacity: 13L

ELECTRONICS, RIDER AIDS & CONVENIENCE FEATURES

(Varies by model, some features are options)

Base: ABS; **Limited:** ABS, Ride Modes, USB Charge Port, Cruise Control, Traction Control; **Limited with Technology Trim:** ABS, Ride Modes, USB Charge/Data Port, Cruise Control, Traction Control, Keyless Ignition, LED lighting

Base and Limited: N/A; **Limited with**

Technology Trim: 4 in Touchscreen powered by RIDE COMMAND. Touchscreen display includes real-time clock; ambient air temperature; heading; audio information display; map/navigation (navigation available in select locations); Bluetooth status for phone and headset; vehicle status (voltage, engine hours, oil change); vehicle info (speed, fuel range, RPM, gear position); current ride data (distance, moving time, stop time, altitude, altitude change); trip meters; ride mode selection; screen brightness; and vehicle trouble code readout

ETCETERA

Ride-away prices: Classic from \$23,495; Bobber from \$22,995; Sport Scout from \$23,995; Super Scout from \$26,995; 101 from \$27,995

Test bike supplied by: Indian

URL: <https://www.indianmotorcycle.com.au>

Warranty: Two years



motorcycle design. It must be remembered that as a cruising machine, it doesn't need the dynamic ability of other machines, it just needs enough to stay out of trouble... and it has that. However, the following points do impact the bike's rideability and need managing.

The 13-litre fuel tank is a bit light on. Effective range will be no more than 200km, perhaps 250 before sending a mate off to a servo for a couple of water bottles filled with fuel. Adjustable levers aren't included, so smaller-fingered riders will find the OEM levers a bit difficult to deal with. Cornering clearance is acceptable for this type of bike, but if an emergency line change is required mid-corner... it's going to ground out hard. If this is a regular problem, some longer

shocks would help a lot. There's a burn shield covering the RHS exhaust; it may get a bit hot on the inside leg in some situations. Finally, the underslung mirrors fitted to the Sport, Bobber and 101 are more style than function. Head movement is required to see what's going on behind and that can be a problem in some instances.

CONCLUSION

Fans of Americana motorcycling should note the new Scout range provides a nice solution for most cruiser tastes, whether it's classic, classic touring, attitude cruising or dynamic cruising. The standard bikes are good and the large range of factory accessories will entice customers to personalise their Scouts.

The bikes impress with their quality feel, array of features making them thoroughly modern machines, and style that's proved to be timeless. The Scout lineup offers somewhere to go for riders struggling with draconian speed limit compliance, no desire to enter adventure bike world, and unwilling to accept the severe trade-offs cruisers have come with in the past. We think the MY25 bike widens the model's appeal, and ARR expects they'll do well, securing their role as Indian's volume seller. **ARR**



Comment or
rate this article.

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WHERE THE HELL IS DALGETY?

He doesn't seem to know where he's going,
but he usually gets there...

BY GEOFF ROSS



Day 1 - Brunch at Tenterfield

CHUMPS already? Where the hell is Dalgety? Ahh, here it is, just north of the Victoristan border. Should be a good run.

The Mighty Speed Triple had been retired from interstate express duties in favour of a BMW R 1150 GS I'd recently purchased. Ever since I bought it I've been convincing myself that GS BMWs are the 21st-century version of a Penny Farthing... once you're in motion it's all good, but the 0-5km/h and 5-0km/h zone are fraught with danger due to a combination of the mass, and the height of the centre of gravity. If it does start to tip, not very far off the vertical is where the point of no return lurks. Once you've over-familiarised yourself with it, there's not much else to do apart from have

a bit of a lie down. I'm hoping to avoid that. (Please, nobody tell Geoff the GS's cog is one of the lowest in the business when it comes to big adventure bikes... or that he probably bought the heaviest one they ever made, short of the Adventure version — Ed.).

There are some boring bits in this trip but I'll skip over them so you don't lose interest.

First overnight stay is in the pub in Stroud. The room was possibly a bit more expensive than its facilities warranted and when I went down to the lounge to get some sustenance, I was told there was an issue in the kitchen which made grilling or cooking anything flat problematic. So no burgers or steaks, but pasta is fine. Pasta it is then.

Leaving Stroud the next morning at 15 minutes after sparrow fart, I was hopeful

"...I HAVE TROUBLE FOCUSING ON ANYTHING SMALLER THAN A WATER BUFFALO"

of letting the local wildlife wake up, have a stretch and then get about their day BEFORE I hove into view, rather than after. I was almost successful in this, but not entirely.

POTHOLE GALORE

As I approached Dungog I came across one of NSW's crack "Pothole Insertion" squads. There was a stop sign facing me, so I pulled up and engaged them in conversation. They claimed that they were actually fixing the potholes, but the unfeasible amount of unwanted road texture in the area told me this must surely be council misinformation.

Because it was foggy, my visor misted up as soon as I stopped, so I popped it up to clear it. When the sign turned to GO I took off, but before I had a chance to drop my visor again a bug flew into my eye. I stopped and using one of my mirrors, attempted to dig it out with a handily folded paper towel. Unfortunately my eyes are no longer at the top of their game and without my glasses on, I have trouble focusing on anything smaller than a water buffalo. With my glasses on I could see perfectly well but access issues stymied me. After a lot of poking about using plain old guesswork, I was partly successful. My eye still felt a bit bug-filled, so I developed a plan. When I next stopped for fuel, I'd ask to borrow the servo's eyewash kit. They'd have to have one, given all the volatile liquids they deal with, so I found a servo at Singleton (a surprisingly difficult task — NSW servos always seem to be out of sight down side streets) and after I'd paid, I asked the counterjumper about their eyewash kit.

By the expression on his face, you'd swear I'd asked him to calculate the square root of zero. He paused for a bit before eventually replying, "We don't have one." I suspected he might have been fibbing, but I realised that my tear ducts (luckily nowhere near as decrepit as my eyes) had fulfilled their design brief and my eye felt to be mostly bug-free, so an eyewash was no longer required.

THE PUTTY TO THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

A midweek run down the Putty is always good for the soul, but if I'm honest, the road looked to be in about the same condition it was in 12



ABOVE Day 1 - Main Street Tenterfield BELOW Day 2 - Metres away from the hottest pie in all Christendom - well Blackheath, anyway.





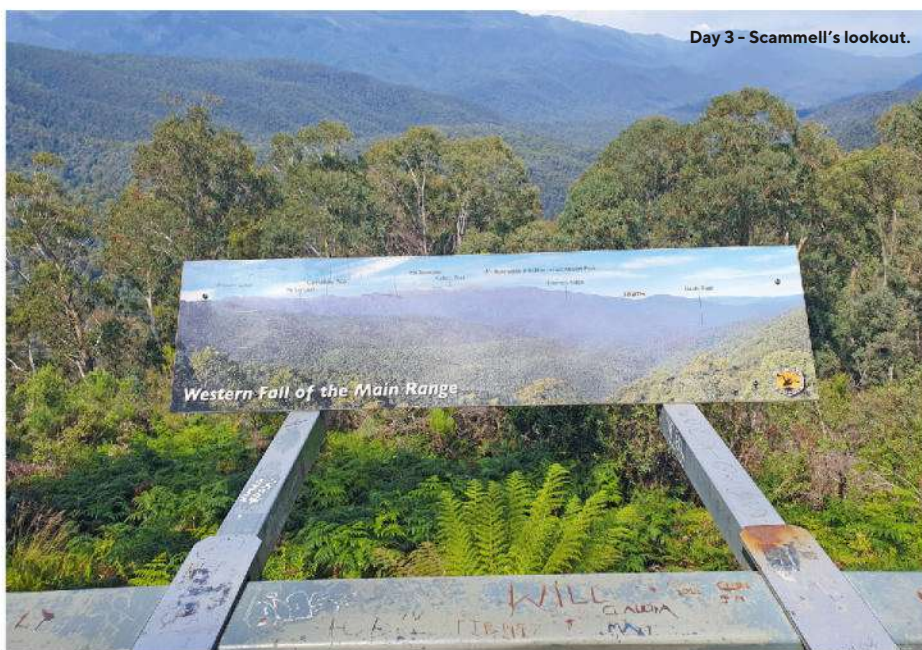
Day 3 - Dead Horse gap - no sign of any dead horses though.

"...HEATED UNTIL IT WAS HOTTER THAN THE EARTH'S CORE"

months ago, although there did seem to be one exception. The hi-vis shirts controlling the lights at each end of the roadworks now had company. They'd obviously blown a chunk of their budget on a couple of new chairs.

Rather than running all the way to Wilberforce, I took the Kurrajong exit, turned up Bells Line of Road and then spent an hour or two swearing at the traffic. I eventually made it to Blackheath for fuel and while I was there, I committed a bit of a faux pas. After I'd fuelled up the bike I was now in the mood for a snack. While paying for the fuel, I asked for the whereabouts of a good cafe. This offended the boss, who waved his arm expansively in the direction of their many foodstuffs, all of which were top-quality nosh.

I wasn't really in the mood to argue the point, so I caved and bought a chicken pie and a coffee. As soon as I paid, the pie was popped in the microwave and heated until it was hotter than the earth's core. It was in the microwave for so long I thought I was going to have to find local accommodation. When it was eventually handed over, I took a seat and then had to waste even more time waiting for it to cool.



Day 3 - Scammell's lookout.

I thought it never hurts to tap into local knowledge, so I asked where the turn off to Goulburn was, prompting the boss to take 10 minutes not really explaining anything, while waving his phone around with purpose. He eventually confessed that he didn't actually know, because he wasn't a local. Luckily, his female subordinate was a local, but she'd obviously kept her own counsel until I asked

her. I'm going to assume that she didn't want to be accused of upstaging the boss. Retrace my steps a few kilometres and I was Goulburn bound via Oberon.

OBERON AND THEN SOUTH

I refuelled in Oberon and then headed in the direction of Yass. There used to be a hilariously rude McDonald's sign (MYASS) on the



ABOVE Day 3 - Scammell's lookout.
BELOW Day 3 - Tooma - Southern Cloud Memorial lookout.





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highway but, disappointingly, it disappeared quite some time ago.

When I got to the pub at Yass, I asked the barmaid about a room. She was a delightful French girl whose grasp of English was obviously less important than whether she could pour a beer and look good while doing it. She gave me a room key and when I asked where the room was, she pointed at the stairs and indicated I should climb. It was when I asked about the bathroom facilities that the wheels fell off slightly. She furrowed her brow and thought for a second before indicating what area of the second floor the showers were.

I clomped up the stairs awkwardly, carrying both panniers, helmet, gloves, and a plastic bag full of fripperies I'd fished out of the topbox. After consulting the tag on the room key, I was soon unpacking and 10 minutes later, towel over shoulder, toiletry bag and fresh jocks in hand, I was off to the showers. I headed in the direction I was shown and eventually found the worst showers and toilets I'd ever seen. One of the showers had no head, none of the stalls

(toilets included) had doors and the floor was covered in glass.

Hmm, time for a chat with Inspector Clouseau. As it happened, English wasn't the only thing she struggled with; spatial awareness wasn't really her bag either. After she'd climbed the stairs, she looked about for a second or two before heading off in the opposite direction to the one she'd initially indicated. There, right at the end of the corridor, were the wash facilities. Still not what I'd call palatial, but at least I was no longer in danger of getting tetanus. On the bright side, the kitchen was fully functional.

LOST FOR FUEL

Departing Yass the next morning, I played a round of the now mandatory "Find the servo" game in Gundagai and eventually won a full tank of petrol. Heading in the direction of Tumbarumba, I'd made it to Tumut when I got lucky and it started raining. Lucky, I hear you ask? I stopped outside a butcher shop in Tumut and started donning my wet gear under their awning. The butcher got curious about the wet idiot hopping about on one leg swearing

profusely, and after a short conversation it became apparent that I'd had an attack of navigational incoherence. I'd missed a turn-off and was about to head into an area that is traditionally marked on charts as "Here be dragons". Route amended, thanks given, and I'm off in the direction of Tumbarumba.

NEED FOOD

By Tumbarumba, I was hungry and thirsty (I was breakfast free up to this point) so I stopped at a cafe. As I was stripping off my wets, I noticed the oddest statue out the front. In what I can only imagine is a tribute to horse gymnasts the world over (an unsung group if ever there was one), a sculptor had carved a riderless, but fully tacked up horse doing a headstand. Not the oddest thing I've ever seen, but definitely top ten.

After breakfast I found myself at the Khancoban end of The Alpine Way. You pass a small place on Alpine Way called Greg Greg, which continues the NSW tradition of letting place names be chosen by people with hard-ons for double-barrelled names and the letter



G. This can be the only explanation for Gumly Gumly, Gol Gol, Goonoo Goonoo, Grong Grong and Wagga Wagga.

The Alpine Way is a great road, being both grippy and twisty. A bit wider would have been nice because the GS was a bit of a handful in the tighter bits, but I'm not complaining. The application of a bit of muscle saw it carving the bends in a satisfactory fashion, but I was starting to regret not bringing the Triple. It'd be very easy to get over excited halfway to Jindabyne and seriously overcook a corner, and I pondered how many ABS-equipped bikes and skeletal corpses were at the bottom of some of the deeper gullies due to an absence of fresh skid marks on the road to indicate something had gone seriously awry.

After a quick stop at Dead Horse Gap (a mere 646m below the height of the summit of Mt. Kosciuszko, what do mountaineers go on about?) I was in Jindabyne. It's a very picturesque place, complete with a vast lake full of last year's now unfashionable snow. Another round of "Find the Servo" and it was on to Dalgety.

DALGETY, AT LAST

Two days later, the trip home from Dalgety got off to a bit of a bad start when, on the shortest route to Canberra, I turned up what appeared to be an endless dirt road. I eventually came across a farmer who seemed to be transferring 6,000,000 sheep from one paddock to another just down the road. He told me that the bitumen started just down the road. For those not playing along, "just down the road" in ruralspeak is about 30km. Bitumen

was eventually found and I headed off in the direction of Canberra, with a view to at least make it to Newcastle.

The trip from Canberra to Newcastle was meant to be fairly easy. A lunch companion at The Banjo Paterson Inn in Jindabyne assured me that if I just rode straight up the Hume Highway I'd eventually arrive in Newcastle. This was outstanding advice if delivered to a normal person. Unfortunately, my companion had no idea what sort of navigational dyslexia he was dealing with.

I fuelled up in Canberra and headed up the Federal Highway, turning up the Hume when I got to Goulburn. As I neared Sydney, my fuel reserves were going down (I still had about seven litres left, but I'm a bit OCD about it) and after not seeing many servos on the 200km stretch between Goulburn and Sydney, I started to panic and eventually peeled off at the Mt Druitt exit. The entire area seemed to be an industrial estate and most of the servos were unmanned and only dispensed diesel. I eventually found a servo that not only dispensed petrol, but miraculously was so close to the expressway that I could see it from the forecourt. This turned out to be bad juju because not 10 minutes later it all went wrong. I rejoined the expressway and discovered that everybody in Sydney had nipped out for a drive as well.

Purely for survival purposes, I ended up in the least-populated lane, which was the inside one. This is how I found myself in the wrong lane when the expressway split and suddenly I was now on the road to Pennant Hills, wherever that was. I figured that if I took the next exit and rode into the afternoon sun,

"...I PONDERED HOW MANY ABS-EQUIPPED BIKES AND SKELETAL CORPSES WERE AT THE BOTTOM OF SOME OF THE DEEPER GULLIES..."

I'd eventually find the expressway again. Long story short, I ended up inadvertently turning into the Macquarie University carpark. (No, I don't know how I did it either.)

My options from there were limited so I rejoined the expressway and eventually found an exit that led to more than a carpark. After stooging about in some ridiculously heavy traffic, I spotted a sign pointing me in the direction of the Pacific Highway and Newcastle. By then I'd spent so much time being lost I decided that Newcastle would do me and I found a nice pub for the night.

THUNDERBOLTS

The trip from Newcastle to home was moderately uneventful apart from one less-than-stellar moment. After breakfasting in Stroud, I headed through Gloucester and up Thunderbolts Way. On the southern end of Thunderbolts is a downhill corner that corkscrews to the right and leads onto a bridge. I overcooked it slightly and the downhill aspect certainly didn't do me any favours. There was some delicately applied braking, some delicately applied extra leaning, some delicately applied profanity, and some indelicately applied brown staining to my underwear.

The upshot was I saved the day, kissed the girl and no longer have any chicken strips on the right-hand side of my tyres. Beats crashing into a river and drowning in six inches of water, trapped under half a ton of Teutonic Tarmac Tackler.

SOME TIME LATER

Back in Queensland at last. Total distance travelled? 3495km in six days AND I'm still on speaking terms with my arse. BMWs are better at long hauls than Speed Triples. Who knew? **ARR**



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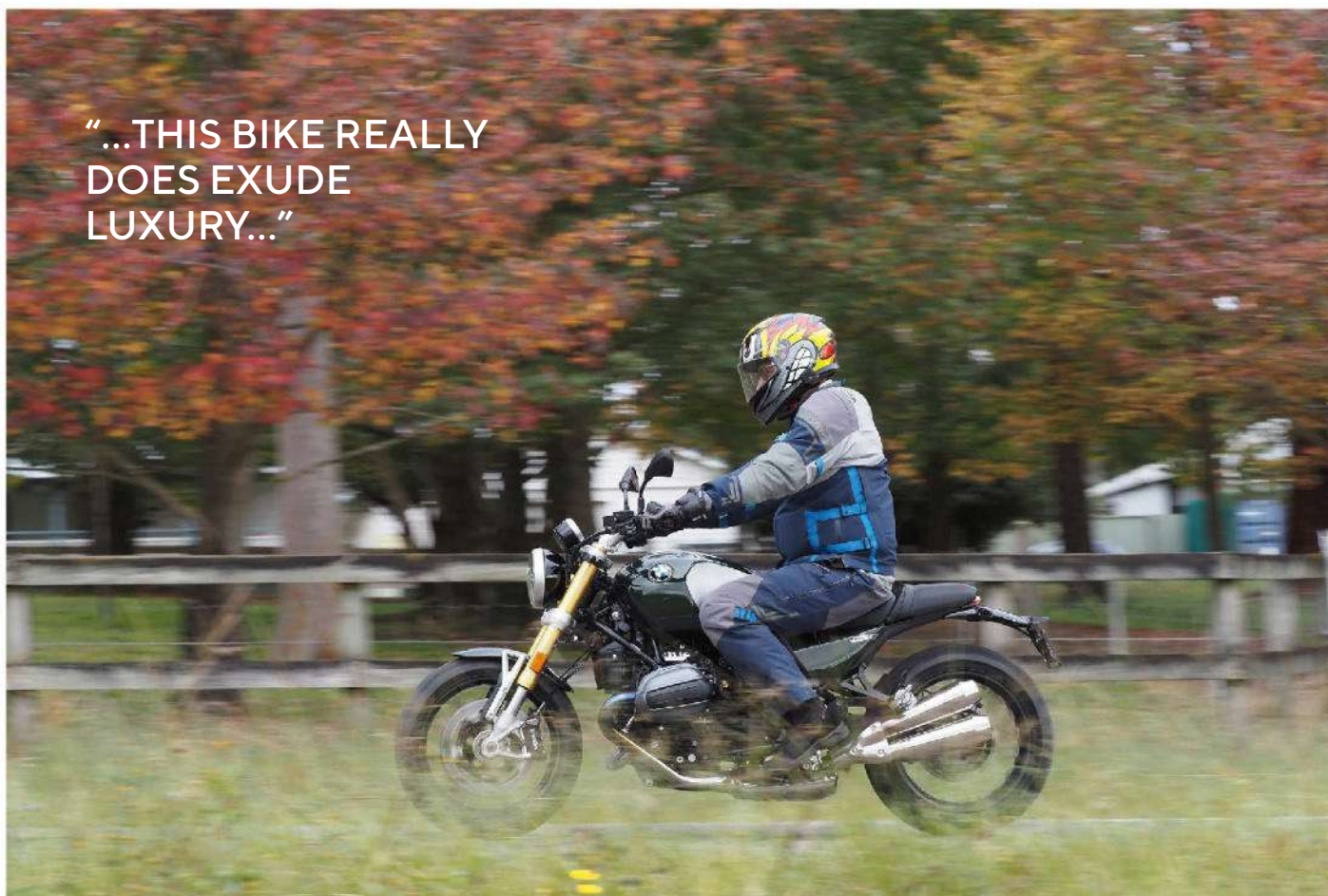
THE CUSTOMISABLE BEEMER

Ten years after the R nineT, updates abound...

BY NIGEL PATERSON. PHOTOS KIRRILY VINE



"...THIS BIKE REALLY
DOES EXUDE
LUXURY..."



With the advanced technology BMW likes stuffing into its motorcycles, customising the modern versions can be fraught. Change the indicators and the electrical system might throw up errors, try to fit a different set of instruments and "bricking" the bike (locking up one or more electronics units) is possible. And as for modifying the chassis, BMW usually doesn't make that easy.

Despite this, there's a large and passionate community of riders out there modifying

their R nineT's, and the new R 12 nineT should actually make their job easier; BMW has realised if it's easier for owners to build the bike they want, they might buy German instead of going British (Triumph Speed Twin), Japanese (Kawasaki Z900RS) or American (Harley-Davidson Sportster S) in the pursuit of something cool, collectable, fun to ride and personalised.

A highlight of the BMW is its quality of finish. This bike really does exude luxury; from the paint to the quality of the finish, to

the alloy and ancillary parts, it's hard to find anything to criticise. BMW has made changes to make the bike (and its sibling, the new R 12) more modular in build, so 'modules' can be ditched and replaced with something more appealing to the owner.

In addition, the bikes are supplied fairly stripped-back... the cynic in me thinks that's to get buyers spending money on options, upgrades and accessories at purchase, but it also works to make the machines more appealing to those looking to heavily customise their bike.



Glorious twin pipes.



Shaft drive, spoked rims.





Our test bike's paint scheme was fantastic.



Seat comfort is fine for shorter rides.



Lovely quality of finish to the ancillary items.



Dual dials can be switched out for a compact digital instrument display.

A STEEL FRAME

There's a newly designed Steel Space Frame wrapped around the updated engine, and there's now a bolt-on steel subframe. The design is cleaner and classic, but it's also easier to change.

Although a heritage model with retro bike style, the single-sided swingarm and rising rate single shock are thoroughly modern, but somehow this doesn't ruin the classic style.

The redesign runs to the tank, which is shorter to reduce the seat-to-handlebar distance, although the accompanying reduction in fuel capacity to 16L isn't so welcome in Australia.

CUSTOM BMWs

Before the R nineT came along in 2013, customising BMWs meant setting up one of the adventure models to better suit the rider or journey. The idea of customising any of the BMW road bikes was, well, weird, but these days that's not the case. The heritage models, which started with the R nineT, changed all that. Turns out there were Boxer lovers who wanted something unique.

"...WITH 109HP ON TAP AND GOBS OF TORQUE, THIS THING IS VERY CAPABLE..."

The new R 12 nineT has its airbox flat under the seat and a rear suspension set-up which stays out of the way (to an extent...) so the tank, seat, subframe, handlebars and lots more can be changed or modified more easily than in the past or on many competitors' bikes.

Pipes are a common thing to change, and BMW is offering various options. Standard is the "Twin Pipe" design, the exhaust system running down the left-hand side of the machine with a pair of reverse cone mufflers offering a classic look. The catalytic converter now sits in a "front silencer" in front of the rear wheel, and the exhaust flap on the old models has been eliminated (which will be a relief to many a customiser). There are genuine options to change out the exhaust system, including a sports titanium model.

Up front is a pair of round analogue instruments in keeping with the heritage style of the bike, but BMW is offering a small

rectangular digital pod as a replacement. If you want to tuck away the instruments to make the bike look like it doesn't actually have any (something Harley has been doing for years), it's now possible.

The stock units are 5mm larger than the old models and BMW claims they are easier to read. I didn't have any problems, but my multifocal glasses script is up to date...

SPORTS BASE

Although it's a heritage model with retro style, don't for a moment think this BMW is slow; with 109hp on tap and gobs of torque, this thing is very capable in a straight line and in the twisties. Indeed, the engine hasn't really changed much since the first model a decade ago, because owners aren't demanding it — buyers of R nineT models have never been horsepower junkies, so BMW has made few changes to the outright performance for this model.



The example has the small bikini fairing and single seat cowl.

THREE MODELS

In addition to the standard model, there's also the High Line and Option 719 variants in the BMW line-up.

The R 12 nineT HL gets the single seat, Headlight Pro, tyre pressure control, ConnectedRide Control plus the Comfort Package (Hill Start Control, Gear shift Assist Pro [quickshifter], heated grips and Cruise Control).

The Option 729 model looks stunning in its brushed aluminium colour and red frame, while also being fitted with the same additions as the HL, plus Option 719 Wheels Classic and additional Option 719 Style components: Single Seat, Option 719 Billet Pack Classic, Option 719 Billet Pack Shadow II, Aluminium Windshield.

Colours include Black Storm Metallic, San Remo Green Metallic and Aluminium (Option 719 only).



USD forks, big Brembo brakes and a 17-inch wheel add up to good handling.



The R12 logo above one of our favorite Boxer twins ever.

COMPETITION



Harley-Davidson Sportster S, from \$23,995 Ride Away

Stylish, different, yet full of heritage cues, the latest Sportster aims to be something similar to the R12 nineT: fast enough, modern, well equipped and good looking. It's let down by short suspension travel and balloon tyres, but is priced affordably.



Kawasaki Z900RS, \$17,677 plus rego, stamp duty and ctp (\$19,108 Ride Away Sydney)

Four cylinders, modern tech, high performance, classic style... the Z900RS offers up character and useable performance with a heavy dose of retro, while being much cheaper than the European offerings.



Triumph Speed Twin 1200, from \$21,990 Ride Away

From the number of cylinders to the weight, retro style and performance, Triumph's Speed Twin 1200 offers a lot for less money than the BMW... but the German bike has more tech.



Ducati Scrambler 1100 Sport Pro, from \$26,200 Ride Away

The only 1100 Scrambler in the line-up, this bike offers old-school V-twin performance in a retro package for similar money to the BMW. Exuding character and style, the Scrambler doesn't offer quite the performance or tech, but does offer Italian soul.



Akrapovic pipe is an option.

THE HERITAGE MODELS

First introduced to celebrate 90 years of building bikes (which is where the 'nineT' name came from), that first model a decade ago spawned lots of variants, including the Scrambler, Urban G/S, Racer and Pure. Most are still available, although we wonder when they might be updated to the new platform — some may be dropped and replaced by new models.

New to the line-up is the R 12, which is a little more cruiser... it's got a bigger front wheel, higher handlebars, a cruiser saddle and footpegs set forward just a bit for a more "relaxed" riding position.

The success of the R nineT models inspired BMW to develop the R 18 range of cruisers and tourers.



"THERE'S ADJUSTABLE,
QUALITY SUSPENSION
AT BOTH ENDS..."

There's adjustable, quality suspension at both ends and it's well set-up — not too hard, not too soft — which encourages spirited riding. It's not, of course, a naked sportsbike in the mould of an S 1000 R, but it's a lot more capable than, I think, many casual observers might think.

There are sportsbike wheel sizes to go with the suspension (17-inch wheels with a 180-section rear) and big 310mm discs and 4-piston monoblock calipers. As you'd expect from a long (1510mm wheelbase), shaft-driven, 220kg bike, it's not the fastest steering or lithe machine, but I don't think there are any buyers out there expecting it to be. However it is capable and does offer a dynamic, sporty ride.

ON THE ROAD

The riding position is sporty roadster... and for those who think that's not for them, the new R 12 is more cruiser in style and execution, and cheaper, so you might want to have a look at that.

For those still with me, the R 12 nineT is a bike you can attack a set of twisties on, slip through traffic snarls or simply enjoy the scenery while

riding. Powering the bike is an air/oil-cooled boxer twin — 1170cc, four valves per pot, producing maximum power and torque at close to the same revs, which makes it easy to ride fast, because you don't have to work the engine hard to get performance. Maximum power is produced at just 7000rpm, with maximum torque coming along just 500 earlier and there's 115Nm... so it's certainly got some grunt.

The six-speed gearbox is nice to use, the dry clutch notable for not being a pig of a thing like the dry clutches of old. There's an optional quickshifter if you're someone who likes them.

If you're coming from a sports riding background, I doubt you'll be disappointed; the chassis feels stiff, the suspension provides quality control over the ride and cornering clearance is fine, the brakes are powerful and the cornering ABS is there if you need it. Although way down on power output and on the heavy side compared to sportsbikes, the tractable engine, low centre of gravity and neutral feel to the steering make it lots of fun to ride on a winding road, so while you might not be able to keep up with mates on their

200hp rocketships, you can wave as you go past while their ticket is written out.

Bikes like the R 12 nineT are plenty fast enough for road riding.

TECH

The R 12 nineT comes with a Keyless Ride Fob which doesn't work on the steering lock or fuel cap, solving a problem which wasn't there.

There are three riding modes — rain, road and dynamic. I liked dynamic and road, didn't try out rain because, well, life is too short. Road was actually my preference for general riding, offering an easy throttle response that didn't feel damped. Dynamic was good when trying to go faster, especially at higher speeds.

Other tech includes cornering ABS standard (ABS Pro), LED lights (although Headlight Pro is an option) and DTC.

OPTIONS AND ACCESSORIES

While BMW has made changes so personalisation is an easier option (at least in some ways) than the older models, the company is offering lots of parts and accessories which are designed to make your R 12 nineT different to others without affecting warranty...

There's a single-seat rear with brushed aluminium tail-hump and holder for the rear silencer, Option 719 Classic wheel (black spoke wheel, tubeless), tyre pressure monitors and an anti-theft alarm.

There are a huge number of Option 719 bling bits, including wheels, levers and a gorgeous hand-brushed glossy aluminium tank.

SOULFUEL

BMW's marketing uses the term SoulFuel to promote the R 12 nineT, which I think is pretty smart. Motorcycling has splintered over the decades along genres — sports, cruiser, tourer — and in some respects lost its way as bikes became more and more specialised.

Riding an R 12 nineT reminds you it can be fun to ride that little bit slow, maybe even obey the speed limit — but you don't have to; it's more than happy to be punted along at a quick pace. And when you get where you're going, you'll have a bike which stands out in many ways while also looking like a classic piece of machinery. The fact that BMW has built-in ease of customisation makes it even better. *ARR*



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The red frame is on the Option 719 model.



Adjustable suspension.



SPECIFICATIONS

BMW R 12 NINET

ENGINE

Type: Air/oil-cooled two-cylinder, four-stroke boxer engine with two overhead camshafts, four radially arranged valves and central counterbalance shaft.

Capacity: 1170cc

Compression ratio: 12:1

Engine management: Electronic intake pipe injection / digital engine management system: BMS-O with throttle-by-wire

PERFORMANCE

Claimed maximum power: 80kW (109hp) at 7000rpm

Claimed maximum torque: 115Nm at 6500rpm

Fuel consumption: 5.1 L/100km

TRANSMISSION

Type: Claw-shifted 6-gear gearbox with separate transmission housing

Final drive: Cardan shaft

Clutch: Single-disc dry clutch, hydraulically operated

CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR

Chassis: Tubular space frame

Front suspension: Upside-down fork, diameter 45mm, spring pre-load adjustable, rebound and compression adjustable, 120mm travel

Rear suspension: Cast aluminium single-sided swing arm with Paralever brace, central progressive spring strut, spring pre-load adjustable, rebound damping adjustable, 120mm travel

Front brakes: Twin disc brake, floating brake discs, diameter 310mm, 4-piston monobloc radial brake calliper

Rear brake: Single disc brake, diameter 265mm, 2-piston floating calliper

Tyres: F: 120/70 ZR17; R: 180/55 ZR17

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Steering head angle: 62.3°

Trail: 110.7mm

Claimed wet weight: 220kg

Seat height: 795mm

Wheelbase: 1511mm

Fuel capacity: 16L

ELECTRONICS, RIDER AIDS & CONVENIENCE FEATURES

Riding modes: 3 (Rain, Road, Dynamic), Cornering ABS, Traction control (Dynamic), Keyless ride (ignition fob), 12v and USB-C accessory power, LED lighting

Options:

- Shift Assistant (quickshifter)
- Headlight Pro with adaptive light
- Hill start control
- Cruise Control
- ConnectedRide phone cradle, navigation preparation, ConnectedRide Navigator

- Single-seat rear with brushed aluminium tail-hump and holder for the rear silencer
- Option 719 Classic wheel (black spoke wheel, tubeless)
- TPM (tyre pressure monitoring)
- Anti-theft alarm
- Intelligent emergency call (market-dependent)
- Connected Ride Control
- Digital display
- Comfort package: Hill Start Control, Shift Assistant Pro, heated grips, cruise control
- Various Option 719 packages
- Luggage, touring screen

ETCETERA

Price: From \$26,495 Ride Away. As tested, \$30,540 (Sydney registration).

Colours: Black Storm Metallic, San Remo Green Metallic (+\$395), Aluminium (Option 719 model only)

Test bike supplied by: BMW Australia

URL: <https://links.roadrider.com.au/BMWR12-nineT>

Warranty: 5 years, unlimited kilometres



More information.

<https://links.roadrider.com.au/bmwr12-nineT.png>





FABULOUS PHUKET

The editor goes on holiday, hires wheels...

BY NIGEL PATERSON. PHOTOS KIRRILY VINE



Westerners riding with little protective gear.



The Honda Forza 350 we hired.



Scooters everywhere, many carrying surfboards.



At The Cub House, a cafe dedicated to small-bore Hondas.

The road was probably built for the resorts, but they hadn't all been completed, so this winding piece of bitumen running through the coastal hills in the northern part of Thailand's holiday island, Phuket, was deserted yet race-track smooth. The signage, however, was sparse, so I found myself testing the brakes of the Honda Forza scooter I'd hired, not the lightest of machines and a little constrained by the single front disc and being ridden faster than the design brief while two-up... but it was all good. I managed to keep the bike on the left-hand side of the road (no "wrong side" here) and didn't even scrape anything... at least not too much.

Phuket, Thailand, is certainly better known for its beaches, picturesque islands, fabulous and inexpensive food and drunken, offensive tourists. Luckily it's pretty easy to avoid the latter and it can be fun to ride around, too.

MOTORCYCLIST'S BEACH HOLIDAY

Phuket is not the place to go motorcycle touring as such — it's too small. But it's a great place to go for a beach holiday which you can mix with hiring a scooter or motorcycle to get

around and see the place. We had the Forza for a week and managed to see all of the sights we'd planned to visit while discovering some extras along the way.

Hiring a scooter is easy; there are numerous places in every tourist area hiring out machines from 100cc to 350cc, from under \$10/day. The Forza's day rate was about \$30, but for a week we negotiated the price down to \$24/day. (These are the rates for most of the year, but if you go during peak season, Nov-Jan, prices will be higher.)

Motorcycle hire is available on the island, but there are fewer places to rent one, mostly in Phuket Town. To be honest, I don't know why you'd bother, unless your ego won't let you ride a scooter. The distances, the speeds, the traffic all suit scooters and having the convenience of a huge under-seat storage area made the Forza super-convenient. If I'd been solo I may have opted for a smaller machine — you don't even need a 350 unless you're carrying a pillion.

Make sure you closely examine the bike you're hiring and photo or video every last little scratch; there are stories out there about unscrupulous operators ripping off people by charging them for pre-existing damage. You

RIDE SAFETY

For most of the year, Phuket is hot, humid and with a good chance of rain. For these reasons most people ride in shorts, T-shirts, thongs and maybe, just maybe, an open-face helmet. This might go somewhat to explaining why we also saw numerous westerners hobbling around with bandaged feet or wearing moonboots, for foot injuries incurred while riding scooters are one of the most common reasons for visiting an emergency room in Thailand!

Kirrilly and I took our own open-face helmets, summer gloves, jackets and footwear... but I'll confess to sometimes wearing bushwalking sandals and going jacketless on occasion. For longer rides, though, I still think wearing a fully vented/mesh jacket is the go — for protection from sun and wind burn in addition to injury protection in a crash.

The sandals in question had good soles and were far less likely to fall off than thongs or crocs.



ABOVE Spectacular coastal views abound. BELOW Scooters are definitely the way to get around.



"...A WINDING COASTAL
ROAD RUNNING ALONG
THE CLIFFS..."



The Big Buddha.



Selfies during iced coffee breaks.



The monkeys are friendly around the Big Buddha.



Hmm... wanna get stoned?

will be responsible for damage you cause, so it might not be a terrible idea to take an already-scratched machine if you can't afford a surprise... few are pristine.

Before renting, it might not hurt to check out Google reviews of any rental place you're checking out and see if anyone has posted tales of being ripped off. It's easy to do; just open Google maps and find the place you're considering renting from.

THE BIG LAP

Phuket is an oval shape, with the western side stretched a bit longer than the east. The airport lies at the top, in the west, and almost all the towns and resorts lie to the south. Phuket Town is the biggest and busiest city on the Island, sitting in the south-east. It's bustling, busy, and has a huge variety of things to see and do, including the Sunday night markets, the Cub House (a cafe dedicated to the Honda Cub scooter) and ports to whisk you off to the tourist islands.

It's an interesting place to walk around — I especially like watching people making designer handbags — but I also picked up some cool old postcards and enjoyed the food from the busy street vendors (and no, I never got sick).

Inland from Phuket Town is the Big Buddha. You'll need your phone on the handlebars to navigate there, but it's well worth the ride. The Big Buddha is impressive, the views over Phuket Town are spectacular and the monkeys bite... well that's what the sign said, but we didn't do the dumb tourist thing of carrying food they might have wanted to steal — but one did sneak up on me and put his hand on my camera lens, which I didn't see coming!

The sight of a troop of monkeys playing on a building roof nearby was very memorable.

At the southern end of the island is Rawai and its seafood market. You can choose your fresh seafood (all the things you know and many you don't) and have it cooked at the restaurants in the same area — it's stupid cheap and can't possibly be fresher. The views across the fishing boats on the bay to the nearby islands are great, the mango smoothies fantastic and the beers



From the big Buddha, overlooking Phuket Town.



On a boat trip to the Phi Phi Islands.



We found some isolated spots by having our own transport.

are really cheap... but don't be tempted if you're riding, it's bedlam on the roads.

A little further south is the tip of the Island and the Kanchanapisek Lighthouse, which is worth a stop. The lighthouse itself isn't spectacular, but the views from the park are great and there are hundreds of elephants... well, elephant sculptures, anyway. Colourful and in a huge variety of sizes and poses, the display shows the respect Thai culture holds for the elephant.

Hugging the west coast as you head north, there are some relatively quiet roads, beautiful scenery and lovely beaches – Ya Nui and Nai Harn. Winding your way north, you'll climb some hills and ride past numerous resorts, restaurants and more. You'll pop out in Kata, which is home to numerous resorts, a squillion restaurants, shops and another lovely beach. At most beaches in Phuket you can hire a beach lounge under an umbrella for 100 baht, about \$4. Many beaches, especially the Kata-Karon-Patong strip, offer personal watercraft



“THERE’S THE AUSTRALIAN BAR, THE KANGAROO BAR, AN IRISH BAR ...”

hire, surfing lessons and parasailing, right from the beach, at inexpensive rates.

Karon Beach is a bit quieter than Kata, but isn’t as well laid out, with a lack of footpaths and too many tourist trap restaurants — the food is OK, the menus are in English with lots of pictures, but get away from the beach area and the food gets much better and cheaper. We stayed in Karon and discovered this: Mamma Jin and the Elephant Cafe by Tan are much better eateries than the busier places closer to the picturesque roundabout near the beach.

Next up is Patong, the party spot of Phuket. Bang La Road is closed to vehicle traffic each night and the place comes alive with tourists. There’s the Australian Bar, the Kangaroo Bar, an Irish Bar and lots of sprukers promoting their “shows” you wouldn’t take your mother to. We wandered down one night and decided it really wasn’t for us, but that’s one of the great things about Phuket — you don’t have to go to Bang La Road if you don’t want to.

Just like Karon, the restaurants along the beach and close to the tourist hot-spots are

busy, but the best food is found tucked away in restaurants frequented by locals... but then again, having an iced coffee in an air-conditioned cafe with views over the beach was worth paying western prices for.

North of Patong is a winding coastal road running along the cliffs with some views and restaurants along the way. The main road will quickly take you to Kamala (yep, just like the next US president, I hope) but if you turn off early there’s a great winding road past resorts (both finished and unfinished) and spectacular views, as well as very little traffic.

Kamala is an affluent area. Its resorts attract a wealthier crowd than Patong and the south, and it’s quieter and a bit more laid back. We enjoyed some air-conditioned comfort with coffees and cakes. There are more beaches and resorts as you head north from here... it’s getting us closer to the airport, so there are more of the dreaded mini busses ferrying around tourists on the road. They are the biggest menace out there as far as I’m concerned, driving fast and not giving an inch unless they have to. They’ll tailgate and slide on past at any and every opportunity.

Heading inland takes you up into the central mountains of Phuket, winding roads often busy with all sorts of traffic. It’s fairly boring until you get across to the Pa Khlok region in the north-east, where the quiet,

winding and smooth road I mentioned at the start of this article is located. Much fun was had, but be careful, you don’t want to end up in a Phuket hospital or jail! There are lovely views and some great places to eat and drink along the coast.

NON-RIDING OPTIONS

Beyond the bike travel, there are plenty of things on Phuket to soak up your tourist dollars. We visited Phi Phi Islands, which were overcrowded, with the beaches needing a clean-up and infrastructure crumbling, but still enjoyed the beautiful scenery and snorkelling. You can also visit “James Bond Island”, made famous by one of the many spy movies.

Phuket also hosts lots of elephants, but their welfare is questionable so we didn’t ride.

Massages are inexpensive and wonderfully relaxing, the cocktails are about \$4 each and the food... no, it doesn’t have to be spicy and it’s fantastic. We even did a cooking lesson. Oh, and cannabis is legal, so you can get stoned a lot too! **ARR**



Check out the Map via Calimoto
<https://links.roadrider.com.au/PhuketMap>



Spotted inside a bike repair shop, Old Phuket.

LEGALITIES

"The rental comes with travel insurance," the woman renting the bike to me said. "If you get hurt they will look after you at the hospital."

Yeah, right.

The simple fact is many Australians have found themselves well out of pocket after a powered two-wheeler crash in Asia, because if the hire bike's insurance pays out at all, it'll be limited coverage. You need proper travel insurance, and make sure it covers motorcycling. Read the fine print as it may not cover the size of bike you want to rent.

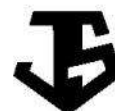
I'm sure *Australian Road Rider* readers will have a correct license, but if you're going with non-riding friends, you may want to point out that no travel insurance (that we are aware of) will cover someone operating a vehicle they don't

have a license for — even if the hire company will rent one out.

While we were in Phuket, the Thai authorities were cracking down on foreign tourists, busting them for not carrying a valid international license, not wearing a helmet, travelling a maximum of 40km/h and not drinking and driving. (I don't understand the 40km/h limit published in the paper — it was the first time I'd seen anything mentioning something like that and I haven't been able to find anything about it since returning to Oz, either.)

To put it simply, riding in Thailand is pretty dangerous... especially if you don't ride at home. For experienced riders it's a great way to get around and with a bit of planning and defensive riding, the best way to see the island.

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BIKES FOR THE BIG TRIP

What we'd ride around Australia...

BY NIGEL PATERSON

BMW R 1250 RT – no news on any upgrade to the 1300cc Boxer engine yet, but we can hope.







BMW's 6-cylinder tourers are sublime mile-eaters.

The idea of circumnavigating Australia by motorcycle has been haunting me for years – it's been rising up the bucket list over time. But what to ride?

A touring or adventure bike is the most obvious answer, but if you want something quicker and don't want to get dirty, sports-tourers are good, too. Physically smaller riders – especially those with less experience – may want something smaller and lighter too, so I've included a couple of ideas.

BMW R 1300 GS ADVENTURE – FROM \$33,160 RIDE AWAY

Yep, it's not the prettiest bike, and we haven't ridden one yet, but we have ridden the R 1300 GS and a version with more fuel range and built to do the long haul. What could possibly go wrong? Seriously though, BMW's Boxer twins have always been built for touring and are one of the few surviving machines to have shaft drive, which is lovely on the road because it's one less thing to look after.

BMW K 1600 – FROM \$45,600 RIDE AWAY

Across-the-frame six-cylinder machines designed to eat miles at high speed with excellent comfort for the rider and passenger. If the Grand American Tourers were designed to cover Route 66 at 55mph (the old Federally mandated highway speed limit), the K 1600s were designed for the fast lane of Germany's Autobahns, which have no speed limit. With their upright riding position, incredibly smooth motor, seamless power delivery and masses of torque, the current BMW K 1600s are so capable, yet pretty good fun, too.

Shaft drive takes away chain maintenance, although be prepared to visit your dealer regularly for tyres, because having gobs of torque, a bit of weight and decent handling means you'll eat rubber. There's lots of tech, they are very comfortable, have great weather protection and will last forever if looked after.

There are four different models, from the 'B' (Bagger) to the Grand America (aimed at beating the Grand American Tourers at their own game), GT (Grand Touring, sporty style) and GTL (like the GT, but with a top box).

The R 1300 GS Adventure might not be pretty, but it will be very capable.



BMW R 1250 RT — FROM \$40,750

RT BMWs were long-considered the ultimate in German touring, thanks to a loping twin-pot Boxer twin engine, super-comfortable riding position and highly protective fairing.

The gloss was taken off the formula a little when the company decided to take on Honda directly with a range of six-cylinder machines, leaving the RT to languish a bit... but no longer. With the current 1250 ShiftCam engine the bike is a delight to ride — personally I prefer the handling of the RT to the K-series machines, because this bike feels more dynamic, sportier, without giving up touring comfort or mile-eating capability.

The integrated panniers are excellent while still being removable, the fairing is really well designed for both protection and airflow, the seat is very comfortable and suitable for two. Unlike many BMWs, the RT comes standard, with lots of features often sold as options or accessories.

DUCATI MULTISTRADA V4 S GRAND TOUR — FROM \$45,400

The Granturismo V4 engine Ducati developed for its Multistradas is an awesome

powerplant, rocketship fast yet flexible and easy to ride (and with 60,000km valve clearance service intervals).

The Grand Tour version is Ducati's long-distance model, with electronic everything and lots of bells and whistles — plus touring components, standard — plastic side cases, a centrestand, heated hand grips and seat, additional LED lights, a tyre pressure sensor and a hands-free fuel cap. There are also riding modes, radar, LED lighting, adaptive cruise and lots more.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON'S GRAND AMERICAN TOURERS

For the chilled-out tour where taking in the scenery is more important than rattling along corrugated gravel, a Harley-Davidson Grand American Tourer can provide comfort, style and a soul-satisfying ride. The two-wheeled models include the Road King, Ultra, Road Glide and Street Glide. The Road King is an unfaired Bagger I wouldn't ride very far on, but the other three are all suitable for this article.

The Ultra Limited (\$47,750RA) is the full-dress tourer, with lots of bodywork weather protection, a thickly padded seat, padded

"...ROCKETSHIP FAST YET FLEXIBLE AND EASY TO RIDE..."

backrest attached to the huge rear top box, and there are integrated panniers too. Unfortunately the Ultra wasn't updated for 2024 alongside the Road Glide and Street Glide (both \$46,495 RA), but when it is the price will probably jump to over 50K.

The Road Glide has a frame-mounted fairing (Sharknose) and mini ape-hanger 'bars while the Street Glide uses a handlebar-mounted (Batwing) fairing with lower 'bars. Apart from that they are very similar machines. Updated for 2024, the new models feature better suspension, bigger, more powerful motors and lots of other improvements.

There's a plethora of accessories available to make these bikes better suited to the long haul, too.

HONDA GOLD WING

Nearly two litres of engine capacity spread across an incredibly smooth horizontally

Ducati's Multistrada V4 S Grand Tour could be perfect for seeing Australia.



Honda's Gold Wing, shot during a test a few years back – comfortable, capable, quicker than expected.



The Honda NT1100 – a little slow for some, but comfortable and affordable.



"...SURPRISINGLY CAPABLE ON A WINDING ROAD, WILL CARRY TWO PEOPLE EFFORTLESSLY ALL DAY, WEEK, MONTH OR YEAR..."

opposed six-cylinder powerplant developed over decades to beat the Grand American Tourers by taking a different path to the same destination, Honda's Gold Wing is simply an amazing machine.

I've met numerous people over the years who have told me they don't go, don't stop and don't handle... but most of those people have never ridden one, or have only done so in traffic on a test ride from a bike shop. Those stories are simply not true. There's no doubt the Gold Wing is not a sportsbike, but it's surprisingly capable on a winding road, will carry two people effortlessly all day, week, month or year-in and year-out, can rack up hundreds of thousands of kilometres with just regular maintenance and are comfortable too.

The current base model doesn't have a top box (fine, but the integrated and centrally

locked panniers aren't really very big) and the rear shock is, well, sub-standard for a bike of this price. The full-dress version is better built for two with electronically adjustable suspension, a top box and backrest, but is pricey these days.

HONDA'S PARALLEL TWIN 1100S

With the NT1100 road bike and Africa Twin adventure bikes, Honda has some great touring options which aren't a Gold Wing.

The Africa Twin is available in standard or dual clutch variants. This 1084cc parallel twin-powered Honda has been hugely successful for the company, because they are great bikes. Aimed at the dirtier end of the market, they have 21-inch front wheels for better off-road performance and 24-litre fuel tanks for decent range.

The NT1100 is a road bike version, much the same motor (so it's not particularly powerful for the class), but it has the adventure-inspired riding position, decent panniers and a protective fairing. There's lots of tech including Apple CarPlay, there's cruise control and decent suspension on all the models, too.

Easily one of the most versatile bikes on the market, an Africa Twin is great on a dirt road and not terrible on a freeway, handy around town but confidence-inspiring crossing creeks.

Priced from around \$28,000 to \$32,000 (depending on which model and where you

live), Honda's 1100cc tourers offer incredible bang-for-buck in a robust, proven formula.

KAWASAKI VERSYS 650 AND 1000

Road bikes which aren't scared of a little gravel, capable as year-round machines that will take long-distance tours in their stride and which are very affordable, Kawasaki Versys 650 (\$12,677 + government charges) and 1000 are under-rated in Australia.

Slotting into the Crossover category (a road bike with adventure style/riding position), both machines are comfortable and capable. Priced under 22K before government charges, the Versys 1000 is one of the cheapest 1000cc-plus bikes in this feature, yet it's also very, very capable (although not as fast as some). There are lots of electronics including cruise control, cornering ABS, traction control and cornering lights, but not electronic suspension or radar.

There are standard handguards and an adjustable screen, optional panniers and top box, plus a long seat built to take two people comfortably.

The Versys 650 is a surprisingly capable touring bike, especially suited to solo travel on backroads. It's comfortable, can be equipped with Kawasaki's excellent panniers, has decent suspension and is surprisingly sporty. Fast too, considering it's LAMS approved.



Kawasaki's Versys 1000 is big, comfortable and priced right.



Want something a little sportier? The Suzuki GSX-S1000 GT Panorama is a sports-tourer with standard panniers.

Triumph's Tiger 900 GT Pro has many creature comforts with adventure-class capabilities.



TRIUMPH TIGERS

A range of road-oriented or dirt-focussed adventure tourers, the inline triple powered Triumph Tigers have a reputation for ticking all the boxes at an affordable price. While they lack the cutting-edge tech of the German brands, the prices are close to the Japanese, which, combined with the unique feel of the triple, makes for a special touring experience.

The 1100 (from \$30,790) is shaft-driven while the lighter 900 (from \$21,850) gets by with a chain. The 1100 has heaps of grunt and is comfortable on the long haul, but the 900 feels better balanced with better handling. Both bikes can feel a little top-heavy, especially the 1100.

Triumph offers basic versions of each model, plus Pro (higher spec, road-focussed) and Rally Pro (dirt focussed) versions.

SUZUKI GSX-S1000GT PANORAMA

Yeah, it's a sports-tourer... but for those who want something a little more capable on the winding roads you'll find during a big lap, the GSX-S is a great choice, and the Panorama package includes panniers to make packing that much easier.

Just \$21,990 ride away makes this one of the most affordable bikes in this list, especially if you add genuine panniers to the competition. At that price it's surprising there's cruise control and a 6.5-inch instrument display with good connectivity. Modern and bullet-proof, the GSX has enough power to be comfortable for two and a load anywhere. At 226kg it's not heavy, there's decent suspension and Brembo brakes, there's an optional touring screen, heated handgrips and premium seat available, plus there's a three-year warranty.

SUZUKI V-STROMS

Although most people will gravitate to the 1050, the V-Strom 650 (\$15,090) is actually a perfectly capable bike to ride around Australia. Indeed, it's one of the least-expensive bikes we can think of for such a jaunt. While the 650 would be best ridden solo, the 1050 could happily take a pillion passenger too. In fact, there are a couple riding around the world on a V-Strom 1050 right now.

Proven reliable and updated recently, the latest V-Strom 1050 (\$20,990 Ride Away) features cast wheels (19-inch front) so it's comfortable on dirt roads in addition to the

bitumen. Both the V-Strom 1050 and V-Strom 650 are more soft-roaders than hard-core adventure bikes and as such are comfortable and user-friendly bikes to ride all day.

If your off-road requirements are higher, the 'DE' versions of the 1050 and new 800 have a spoked wheel with a 21-inch up front.

The 1050's engine is all midrange, which is just what you want on a big lap. The 650, which is available in both LAMS-approved and full-power versions, would really suit someone looking for a touring bike with less power, weight and price, yet is still comfortable and capable.

Yamaha's venerable FJR1300 is fast, smooth, handles well and carries heaps of luggage.



YAMAHA FJR1300 – \$34,649 RIDE AWAY

Yamaha's four-pot, shaft-drive sporty tourer hasn't changed a lot since its introduction nearly 25 years ago... because the formula was great from day one. These days it has cruise control, electronic suspension riding modes, LED headlights and assist and slipper clutch, which the early models lacked. The built-for-two chassis and seating, voluminous panniers, protective fairing and electronically adjustable screen have all been updated over the years. **ARR**



The Suzuki V-Strom 1050 can take two people for extended trips in comfort.



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SMALL-BORE STREETFIGHTER

A naked Kawasaki for new riders, commuters, and anyone looking for an inexpensive machine...

WORDS BY NIGEL PATERSON. PHOTOS KIRRILY VINE

Compact, lightweight, easy to ride and easy on the wallet, Kawasaki's new Z500 naked is aimed squarely at new riders and commuters and is unlikely to disappoint — although here are *Australian Road Rider* we'd definitely recommend you find the extra bucks for the SE model with its extra features.

For 2024, Kawasaki boosted capacity of the venerable parallel twin to 451cc and rounded that up to 500 for the bike's name... the result is a more flexible powerplant that rides better at higher speeds, like freeways and country highways, although the bike is still at its best in an urban environment.

For anyone looking for a cheap way to get into bike riding or to get to the office, the Z500 would make a great choice.

STYLE AND ERGOS

With its streetfighter good looks, bright-green Kawasaki racing highlights and blacked-out components including the wheels and engine, the latest Z500 really does have the style of its bigger brothers.

The Z500 is at the smaller end of mid-range motorcycles, with a short wheelbase, lightweight build and physical dimensions which make it easy to push around the garage. The seat height, at 785mm, is very low for a conventional motorcycle with a sporty riding position... you'll be looking at smaller bikes to find anything much lower, unless you go to a cruiser.

Importantly, the front of the seat tapers in close to the tank, so getting your leg straight



Urban handling is excellent.

when you stop is pretty easy. The handlebars are fairly flat and low, so there's a bit of a reach to them, but that's a good thing as when you're doing even a moderate speed, this gives you a great feedback from the front tyre and suspension... and when you get up to highway speeds (above 80km/h), you don't feel like you're going to get blown off the back.

At 185cm, I am a bit tall to be truly comfortable on a Z500, especially in relation to the high footpegs, which are set for a sporty riding position. Around town I found this to be fun and fast, but for extended rides it became tiring, which was not surprising. Given the requirement to keep the price as reasonable as possible, it's good to see LED lights at both ends (unfortunately not the indicators), digital instruments (although the SE model gets a TFT display) and Bluetooth connectivity.

THE ENGINE

Up 51cc over the previous model, Kawasaki's "smaller" parallel twin (the company has a big range of 650 twins too) is now used in the Eliminator cruiser and Ninja 500 sportster, and it's an evolution of the motor that Kawasaki has been building since... well, forever. The first Kawasaki liquid-cooled small-bore twins started appearing in the 1980s and have continued on



with updates and research and development changes right through to the modern era and this bike. As such, it's likely most owners will find their Z500 bulletproof reliable for many, many years, especially if maintained to the manufacturer's recommendations.

In its current form, this 451cc powerplant provides an excellent balance between being easy to use for new riders while offering a decent turn of speed for experienced riders buying the bike for its other features — affordability, weight, reliability and style.

For the technically minded there's liquid cooling, four valves per cylinder, double-overhead cams... and seriously, none of that is unusual, remarkable or special in 2024. Just know it's a well-built motor which provides a decent turn of speed for a small-bore bike.

Possibly more important is the assist and slipper clutch so it's light and forgiving to use (dump the lever and you're less likely to get a locked-up or hopping back wheel because of poor clutch control). The 45 horsepower and 42 Newton Metres of torque means the Z500

“AROUND TOWN I FOUND THIS TO BE FUN AND FAST...”

is easy to get off the line and will out-pace all but the fastest of tin-tops from the lights when you need to get away quickly.

CHASSIS AND HANDLING

The Z500 has a steel trellis chassis and box-section swingarm. It uses the engine as a stressed member, and it has a single rear shock on a linkage and conventional front forks. The wheels are cast-alloy 17-inch units with a 110-section front and 150 at the rear.

Much of this equipment would have been cutting-edge a couple of decades ago, and many trendy retro bikes don't even have some of those features today. They make for a better motorcycle in many ways... using the engine as a stressed member increases rigidity while reducing weight, a box-section swingarm reduces flex, cast-alloy wheels are lighter than spoked units which improves steering response and suspension performance, a linkage-equipped single rear shock has rising rate characteristics — softer in its initial response to bumps for comfort, firmer as the amount of suspension travel is consumed to give better control and avoid bottoming-out (where all the suspension travel is consumed, transmitting any remaining shock through the seat to the rider).

If you're riding slowly you may never notice these things, but longer rides over bumpy roads and going quicker as your skills improve will have you finding the limits of lesser bikes sooner (and when you're finding the limits of a Z500, maybe it'll be time to move on to something like a Ninja ZX-4R — a racetrack-ready sportsbike, or Versys 650 — a faired versatile sports-tourer).

Kawasaki also offers 650, 900 and 1000cc naked, so there's plenty to move on to if you ever decided the Z500 isn't big enough anymore.

Of course, the Z500's components aren't cutting-edge parts — they would cost too much, but for the target market and target price, I think Kawasaki has done a good job at equipping this bike.

COMPROMISES AND A LACK OF TECH

Building a bike that retails for under 10 grand is always going to mean there will be lots of “missing” features you'd find on more expensive machines, and the Z500 is no exception. Most



of these things are just not going to happen at the smaller end of the market anytime soon, no matter how much you're willing to spend — things like adaptive cruise control, blind spot detection and semi-active suspension. I wouldn't expect those things... but I would really have liked to have seen adjustable levers as many new riders have small hands and need the levers closer to the 'bars.

I'd also like to see cruise control making its way down through to smaller bikes, and the automatic shifting we're seeing on some other brands of bike — learners will appreciate these conveniences as much as more experienced riders.

Luggage is also a problem with small naked bikes, so I applaud Kawasaki for making the pillion peg brackets double as strap hooks and fitting some strap hooks behind the pillion seat too. I would have loved to have seen a helmet lock on a bike aimed at commuters, but alas, the Z500 doesn't have one.

I really don't understand the point of the connectivity built into the Rideology app — its functions don't do anything that couldn't be built into the instruments.

Another compromise is the single front disc brake. It's actually fine, providing reasonable stopping power, but I like twin discs. Some might point to the wheels and tyres and complain they aren't as wide as some, but I would disagree — I think a 110 front-width tyre and 150 rear-width tyre is more than adequate for a commuter 500, making them more affordable than wider tyres without compromising safety and grip, and they should last for ages too.

The suspension is fairly budget-conscious, too. The conventional forks are non-adjustable

and the rear shock has preload adjustability only, but I found both ends to be more than reasonable for what this bike's built to do.

ON THE ROAD

Compared to my Yamaha FZ6, the Z500 feels like a featherweight — even though the capacity difference is only 150cc (and to most people would appear to only be 100cc, because the Z500 is a “500”). I kinda wish motorcycles weren't so defined by their engine capacity, because despite the similarity in capacity, my 600 produces more than twice the power of the Z500; they aren't really comparable in any way, except as an example of how comparing bikes simply on engine size can be highly deceptive.

Kawasaki's Ninja ZX-6RR, a “600”, is even faster, and the Ninja ZX4-R I mentioned earlier is a comprehensively faster motorcycle than the Z500. So the

THE SPECIAL EDITION MODEL

A Special Edition Z500 (SE) model offers original colour and graphics along with other exclusive features and accessories. In addition to TFT instrumentation, an under cowl, and a USB-C outlet, the Z500 SE is equipped with a smoked meter cover, pillion seat cover, LED turn signals, frame sliders, tank pad, knee grip pads and a radiator screen. Buying this model adds about \$900 over the standard bike.



A box-section swingarm for stiffness.



Now getting close to 500cc



The engine is a willing performer.



Digital instruments are easy to read.



The bike is quiet thanks to this large muffler.

SPECIFICATIONS

2024 KAWASAKI Z500

ENGINE

Type: Fourstroke parallel twin. DOHC,

8 valves

Capacity: 451cc

Compression ratio: 11.3:1

Engine management: Digital, fuel injection:
ø32mm x 2

PERFORMANCE

Claimed maximum power: 45.4hp (33.4kW)
@ 9000 rpm

Claimed maximum torque: 42.6Nm
@ 6000 rpm

Fuel consumption: 24.6km/L

TRANSMISSION

Type: 6-speed, constant mesh

Final drive: Chain

Clutch: Wet multiplate, assist and slipper

CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR

Chassis: Trellis, high-tensile steel

Front suspension: ø41mm telescopic fork,
120mm travel

Rear suspension: Bottom-link Uni Trak, gas-
charged shock with adjustable spring preload,
130mm travel

Front brakes: Single semi-floating ø310mm
disc, dual-piston calliper

Rear brake: ø220mm disc, dual-piston calliper

Tyres: F: 110/70R17M/C 54H; R:
150/60R17M/C 66H

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Rake: 24.3°

Trail: 92mm

Claimed wet weight: 167kg

Seat height: 785mm

Wheelbase: 1375mm

Fuel capacity: 14 litres

ELECTRONICS, RIDER AIDS & CONVENIENCE FEATURES

ABS, optional USB-C adaptor, limited
smartphone connectivity

ETCETERA

Price: \$7662 + government charges (\$8613
ride away, Sydney)

Colours: Metallic Spark Black / Metallic Matte
Graphene Steel Gray

Test bike supplied by: Kawasaki Australia

URL: [https://links.roadrider.com.au/
Z500KawAus](https://links.roadrider.com.au/Z500KawAus)

Warranty: Two years unlimited kilometres



More Information

[https://links.roadrider.com.
au.z500kawaus](https://links.roadrider.com.au.z500kawaus)



COMPETITION

Honda CB500, \$10,751

The obvious contender, Honda's 500 twins have been very successful and are great bikes, but a fair bit more expensive. USD forks though...

Yamaha MT-03, \$8349 Ride Away

A bit smaller, but very capable nonetheless. Possibly due for a refresh for the 2025-model range.

CFMOTO 450NK, \$7790 Ride Away

An impressive machine and hard to ignore. Very similar specs to the Kawasaki and worth considering.

Royal Enfield Guerilla, Price TBA

Brand new on the market, this single-cylinder bike from India runs the same engine as the Himalayan 450 in a roadster configuration.

"...NIPPY, CONFIDENCE-INSPIRING AND FUN, WITH A SURPRISING TURN OF SPEED FOR AN INEXPENSIVE LAMS-APPROVED MACHINE"



Z500, despite falling into the middleweight category, really isn't — it's at the bigger end of the small bikes, with its wet weight of just 167kg and wheelbase of 1375mm.

Being much closer to 150kg than 200 makes the Z500 so easy to manage... it really is a doddle at low speeds, yet the design and technology mean it doesn't feel unstable at freeway speeds. Having such a short wheelbase (the distance between the front and rear axles) makes the bike highly manoeuvrable, but again, the bike doesn't get unstable at higher speeds because the package of steering geometry, components and design works well up to and beyond road-legal speeds.

The lightweight build and modern, small engine mean it's very frugal, sipping around 4L/100km when ridden calmly (there's even an Eco light on the dash when you're riding economically), so the 14-litre fuel tank could take you over 300km... No, that doesn't mean I'm saying it has the planted feel of a big bike... for riders used to 200-plus-kilogram

machines, your first ride on a Z500 will feel flighty — but I think that's more about how we expect a bike to feel rather than what it's actually doing.

For older riders like myself, smaller bikes when we were young were usually awful — heavy for their performance and poorly equipped. They didn't handle, they didn't stop and they took a long time to wind up. That's not the case these days, with bikes like the Z500 being nippy, confidence-inspiring and fun, with a surprising turn of speed for an inexpensive LAMs-approved machine.

CONNECTIVITY

You'll need Kawasaki's Rideology app — with the longest disclaimers I've ever seen that you need to agree to before it'll function — plus create an account via Apple or Google. I connected my phone up and discovered... it doesn't do much. There's some vehicle information available, including servicing info, and it can create a log of where you go, but that'll suck your phone battery dry... unless

you buy the optional USB-C charger (standard on the SE model). There's no media or calls handling managed by the app.

CONCLUSION

Learner-approved bikes have come a long, long way in the last 20 years or so, and now there are many options available for new riders, regardless of their physical size and riding ability. The new Z500 fits right in the middle of all that, offering a machine that isn't big, isn't small, isn't a rip-snorter but isn't lame either.

It's comfortable, versatile, affordable and good-looking. No, it's not perfect, but there are no glaring problems, and priced under 10 grand insured and on the road represents great value. **ARR**



Comment or rate this article.

<https://links.roadrider.com.au/Z500Test-181>



I'll be able to fit socks in one day.

NOTHING FITS, AND I'D HATE IT IF IT DID...

BY: GEOFF ROSS

I love watching MotoGP, but I'm constantly baffled by the fact that, apart from the very odd post-crash occasion where they have to quickly get on the spare bike, they always seem to be wearing new gear. I find this to be extraordinary because, ever since I was a young lad, I've had no end of trouble getting bike gear to fit, and every time an old friend (gloves, jacket etc) goes to God, it can take weeks to source a replacement. Even after I've decided on the best of a bad bunch (after visiting every motorcycle accessories shop in the southern hemisphere), the item in question seems to fit so poorly that my buyer's remorse ramps up to a point where it nearly kills me. The only piece of gear I never have an issue with is helmets. I have a perfect, off-the-rack, Arai-shaped head. Lucky me I can hear you say, never having to worry about fit when I can just buy one of the dearest helmets on the market. If I was any luckier I'd be destitute.

Do MotoGP riders have body doubles whose sole job it is to prance around, wearing in their next set of leathers, gloves and boots? If they do, I imagine Mick Doohan's doppelganger wouldn't have been looking forward to being "adjusted" after his 1992 Assen mishap.

Back in the land of mere mortals, buying motorcycle gear is somewhat akin to the seven stages of grief, a long drawn-out process that eventually yields acceptable results. All my gear fits me well now, like a glove in some cases (sorry), but it didn't start out that way.

I recently had cause to buy new boots, but this will also cover jackets, gloves and pants with only minor variations. Of course, socks and underwear are free of this scourge, but they're not really suitable gear for anything beyond sexy photo shoots, and I don't do those anymore. Here is the process as it pertains to boots.

THE 7 STAGES OF MOTORCYCLE BOOT PURCHASING

1: Grief. Your much-loved riding companions, your best friends, have passed on. Your beautiful, beautiful boots are no longer. The soles have fallen off for the 14th time and there isn't a grocery or hardware store within 50km of your house that will sell you any more glue, because they now all suspect you're sniffing it. In fact, the last tube of glue you bought was



Alpinestars in a Gaerne box.



Another pair gone.



This can't be good.

from a sketchy looking guy under a railway overpass. The zips look like the sidekick in a 1950s western, with only about three teeth left, and require the patience of Job to actually zip up. If you're completely honest, you can no longer go on a ride without an emergency roll of duct tape in your top box.

2: Bafflement. You're standing in your local motorcycle emporium looking at the vast array of boots. I'm kidding, of course; most of them, regardless of size, only have seven pairs in stock at any one time. Two pairs of hot-to-trot race boots, two pairs of waterproof touring boots, one pair of Johnny Rebs (who's

buying those?) and two pairs of motorcycle shoes. Only the Johnny Rebs are actually made of leather; the rest of them are made of something called Microfibres. They look like leather, but don't really stretch like it. If you're a male of the species, at least four of the seven pairs will be "women's" boots. You can tell they're "women's" boots because the most prominent secondary colour is pink. It goes without saying that not one boot in the shop is your size.

3: Blind hatred. After doing the rounds of every motorcycle shop in the state, you've finally stumbled, completely by accident of

course, on a pair of boots that don't make you look like Krusty the Clown and that you can actually get your feet into. They're a bit tight, but they'll stretch. Hopefully. You go for your first ride and before you've made it to the end of your driveway, your left foot is starting to cramp up and you can't feel the rear brake pedal with your right. The first indication you're applying the rear brake is when the rear wheel locks up and tries to make a race of it with the front wheel. You can't find a comfortable place to put your feet on the pegs and no matter how much you try to straighten your foot, you can't



seem to get it under the gear lever properly, causing you to keep selecting all the false neutrals you never knew you had. You start to dread corners or roundabouts and by the time you get home, you have to crawl up the stairs because your feet seem to be swollen and no longer working properly.

4: Intolerance. It's now three weeks after the inaugural wearing of your new boots and your swollen feet have finally shrunk enough to allow you to attempt to wear them again. If you practice and stretch, you can get your foot under the gear shift and sometimes you can even select the correct gear. The rear brake is still a light switch, on/off with no middle ground,

and your feet still ache by the time you stop for morning brunch, but the new footwear has become almost not unbearable. You still hate them, but you don't really have an alternative, so you imagine you're starting to forge an uneasy alliance with them. In another month or so you'll merely despise them.

5: Despising. It's now week 8 and a day of celebration. For the first time since buying your new torture devices, you've managed to get both of them on your feet and zipped up without uttering any involuntary profanities. You can walk in them without looking like your socks are made out of recycled Lego and most of the gears in the gearbox are

attainable if you concentrate. There's a brake pedal there somewhere, and if you flail about with your foot you'll eventually find it. Luckily, modern front brakes work good enough to make the rear brakes almost unnecessary. If you're one of the Universe's punching bags and your gloves have gone out in sympathy with your boots, and you're now wearing new gloves as well, all I can say is, good luck, you're going to need it.

6: Unhappy. 10 weeks in and your feet mostly work. You still miss the occasional gear and you still can't find the rear brake lever with any sort of consistency, but they aren't as leaky as your old boots, so they could be worse.

“...YOU’VE FINALLY STUMBLERD, COMPLETELY BY ACCIDENT OF COURSE, ON A PAIR OF BOOTS THAT DON’T MAKE YOU LOOK LIKE KRUSTY THE CLOWN...”

You no longer need your valet to assist you in taking them off and putting them on, so Jeeves can go back to polishing the candelabras.

7: Love. It’s now 10 years in. You and those boots have been everywhere. You’ve forded a flooded river to deliver food to orphans in need and while your boots still stink slightly of mud, at least the smell from that has overpowered the stench from that time when you went camping and drank too much Ouzo, accidentally vomiting in the left boot. The gearshift lever has left a distinct divot in the shift pad on top of the left boot, which is so recognisable that other riders can tell what sort of bike you ride. There’s a groove across each of the soles where the footpegs have worn into them and you’ve had to re-glue the soles 13 times. Your boots fit you like gloves and all is good with the world.

You’re out and about with your best mates and, mid brunch, look down and focus on the heel of your right boot where the sole appears to have once again parted company with the boot and has come adrift almost all the way up to the toes. You’ve run out of glue again and the checkout chick at Bunnings gave you massive side-eye when you bought that last tube. You know she’s not selling you anymore. Bugger. You reach into your top box to grab the emergency duct tape and pull out a bare cardboard tube.

“NOOOOOOO!”

1: Grief. And just like that we rinse and repeat.

All of this becomes ten times worse if you’re shopping for replacement gear after an accident. At one point I had to replace jacket, helmet and gloves after a close encounter with Skippy’s bigger, stupider cousin and to be honest, it took me so long I was worried about global oil supplies running out before I was fully kitted once more. I’m not sure what would be the biggest cause of people giving up riding – having to buy replacement gear or getting married and producing kids, but I reckon it’d be a close run to the finish line.

I can imagine some young keen-as-mustard GSX-R jockey finally breaking down and crying in his local bike shop, holding four sets of gloves, none of which are even remotely the same shape as his actual hands, deciding that maybe marrying Sharon wasn’t such a bad idea after all.



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KABUTO'S NEW ADVENTURE LID

Kabuto has a reputation for building premium helmets at mid-tier prices, so we fully expect the new Geosys model to be comparable with the \$1000+ lids from its competitors.

It's got all the features buyers of premium helmets expect, including being handmade in Japan, a high-strength composite shell,

MIPS (Multi-directional Impact Protection System), a Coolmax liner and Deofactor antimicrobial treatment. There are also glasses-friendly cheek pads and Seesaw head ventilation with large openings.

Unlike many helmets, the visor can be removed with the peak in place, although it

can be used with goggles without removing the visor. There's a dedicated space for an intercom battery and speakers, too.

Included are a breath guard, wind shutter and Pinlock anti-fog visor lens.

Kabuto has also brought its wind stabiliser technology to the Geosys thanks to the integrated wake stabiliser.

Priced at \$899 and available in a range of colours. Sizes from XS to XXL.

More info – kabuto.com.au/geosys-2/

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STREAMLINED PACK

A backpack big enough to take a helmet yet streamlined to provide a good riding experience makes for a much happier ride, and now La Corsa has introduced an affordable model so it's time you got one.

The La Corsa Hard Shell Backpack features an aerodynamic anti-drag design, is water

resistant yet comes with a waterproof cover if the heavens open up, has a large 20-litre main compartment that expands to 30 litres for larger items like a helmet, and it can take your laptop, too, in its specific padded compartment. Also inside is dual elastic mesh designed for a drink bottle or shoes.

There's a lightweight hard shell made from heavy-duty water-resistant nylon and reinforced carbon PVC 1680D fabric, silver reflective piping for additional night time visibility, a bolstered back foam profile increases air ventilation and comfort, plus there are fully adjustable waist, chest and shoulder straps with reflective strips.

The La Corsa Hard Shell Backpack is priced at \$99.95 and you'll find lots more information at linkint.com.au.

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A BETTER PHONE DISPLAY

BY NIGEL PATERSON

My ongoing efforts to find the ideal solution to onboard navigation and entertainment has led me to the Carpuride W702, a display which mounts to your bike to provide Apple CarPlay or Android Auto while you ride, and so far I'm pretty impressed.

It's obvious the phone manufacturers and software developers aren't focussed on motorcyclists as using a phone while riding basically sucks. Even touch-enable gloves don't work particularly well as the buttons and boxes displayed are often too small for a gloved finger anyway. They often require a headset simply to function and vibration can destroy smartphone cameras (the vibration breaks the image stabilisation system, something that has happened to my phone twice over four years).

So I was pretty keen to try out the Carpuride when the manufacturer contacted *Australian Road Rider* and offered to supply one for evaluation. We settled on the W702 model, a \$415 Bluetooth-enabled waterproof seven-inch unit. Although it can be used without connection to a smartphone — via its micro SD card slot — beyond listening to music you've downloaded through a Bluetooth headset I can't see much use. I tried to watch some GoPro footage I'd shot but it wouldn't play... I shoot in 50 frame per second so I can create better slow-motion, which I'm guessing isn't supported.

For me, being an iPhone user, the device's usefulness comes from its CarPlay support. Once configured, which wasn't hard, the unit boots up automatically into CarPlay when power is available, which brings me to mounting and powering the Carpuride.

Supplied with the W702 are two cables, USB-A (the most common plug) and one with naked wires for direct connection to a battery. Both cables have a round, screw-in female plug at the other end to connect to the W702's male end. I don't recommend direct connection to the battery because it will drain your battery if accidentally left on — I have a Healtech Thunderbox, a relay with numerous plugs that only supplies power to your accessories when the engine is running. There are alternatives, like running the positive wire to a parking light circuit, which will work well too. I've tried the USB power option on other bikes, although not without problems, but more on that a bit later.

Also in the box is a handlebar mount with ball, extension arm, and there's a ball mount on the unit itself. If you have conventional handlebars, it's easy to mount up. If you don't, you may have to consider your options, but at least RAM Mount products are compatible. My FJR doesn't have conventional bars but I do have a RAM Mirror Mount (rammount.com/products/ram-b-272u) on one of the handlebar bolts, and that works just fine.

On the FJR the W702 worked fine, interfacing really well with my Sena 50S headset. Indeed, with a little more experience I believe I'll be able to leave my phone in a jacket pocket, although I will probably leave the phone mount on the handlebars to keep it charged; navigating through your phone will flatten the battery pretty quick, even if the screen isn't lit up.



Using the Carpuride on other bikes via USB power is a little buggy — I had apps crash when power cut out when the starter button was hit. The only solution was to switch off the unit until the engine was running (or wait until the engine is running before plugging in the USB lead).

Carpuride builds a variety of models beyond the W702 tested here, including versions with mounts to slide straight into the cradle of a BMW Navigator, units with smaller screens, units with integrated "dash" cameras and more.

Check them out at <https://links.roadrider.com.au/carpuride181>.



MORE INFO

CARPURIDE W702
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KRIEGA CAMO

Kriega has added to its popular Trail 9, Trail 18 and Hydro 3 backpack range with a new exclusive "MultiCam Black" colour option.

The Trail 9 and Trail 18 backpacks are among the most popular in the Kriega range, with space for a hydration reservoir and the handy combination of a quick-access zipped section and a fully waterproof compartment.

The Hydro 3 is a lightweight hydration pack with military-grade 3-litre reservoir included and an additional front storage pocket.

All three packs feature Kriega's famous Quadloc Lite harness, providing unmatched comfort even after long days on the bike, and CORDURA 500 fabric construction sets these packs apart with its added durability and ruggedness, backed by Kriega's 10-year warranty.

The new MultiCam Black pattern has its own cult following. Developed by the US-based specialists MultiCam, the pattern is one of a range of multi-terrain camouflage designs that MultiCam licenses to discerning companies around the world. Designed for use in urban environments, this distinctive MultiCam Black CORDURA is sure to make a statement wherever it's seen.

Available from Bike Soup, Australia's exclusive Kriega distributor.

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TIME FOR A CUSTOM SUIT

BY PHIL JAMES

Shoot, the front's gone... relax, relax, relax... go with it, keep the elbows in. These were the thoughts running through my mind as the notorious Turn 1 at Sydney Motorsport Park claimed my scalp. I'd become a human land torpedo... traversing the gravel at 180km/h on the way to blowing a giant hole in my wallet! However, at times like these, one doesn't think about money, it's all about hoping the gear will do its job.

When the dust settled (literally), I was lying 50m from the track and doing the dreaded mental body check one does... when one finally stops. Is there anything really hurting? No... I think I might be ok, thank goodness... I gingerly got up and went over to my stricken machine, noting I'd fared rather better than it. My Italian-made, custom-fit Gimoto leathers, its job done, were trashed – but I'd avoided possibly thousands in medical costs, plus who knows how much pain and suffering. That's money well spent!

Protection is important with motorcycle clothing, as is price, style, functionality and fit. All need consideration. Out of those, fit is the deal-breaker. Nobody likes to wear a sack or, alternatively, be so constricted there's a risk of precious bodily fluids squeezing out. Poor fit also compromises protection, because when it's really needed, armour might not be in the right place or can move out of position... making it useless.

For circuit riding, leather is the only option, and if it's a two-piece suit, it must zip together. Those starting on their future track day obsession will find a road suit or off-the-rack race suit is a good way to dip a toe in the water. As mentioned above, where it becomes a problem is when riders have a bit of talent and find they are starting to pedal around at speed. The faster one goes, the more one must move around on the bike, and a restrictive suit eventually holds back rider development. Off-the-rack suits are nearly always restrictive.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS

Once the decision is made to opt for a custom suit, there's more to consider. In Australia, there are several offerings catering to different budgets. The one thing they all have is matching or exceeding off-the-rack quality. With all suits, the quality of the leather and the level of protection are reflected in



the price. In addition, tailor-made suits have a significantly higher labour cost due to their bespoke construction process.

There's a definite suit quality hierarchy too. The entry level is occupied by cow hide suits through to kangaroo hide, with airbag-equipped suits sitting on top. Well-tanned bovine leather is both protective and supple, kangaroo steps it up with more abrasion-resistance, more tensile strength, and noticeably less weight. It really is a miracle material. For those concerned about wearing the national symbol, I would note kangaroos aren't endangered; far from it, their ability to rapidly multiply in favourable conditions is their great Darwinian advantage (while they're not as bad as bunnies, numbers often reach plague proportions).

At the top of the protection tree are the airbag suits. They've been around for a while and warrant serious consideration as the human body is fragile and doesn't repair well. Airbags offer great protection for the rider's shoulders, one of the most common injury areas and an injury type that's sometimes felt for a lifetime.

MY CHOICE

I've had several custom suits over the decades; some have worn out and some have just gone to God (potentially saving me from the same fate). All have been good suits. My current go-to leather choice is still Italian-brand Gimoto (it has a very satisfied customer after the crash described above).

I've had two of their suits and found they have superb fit and finish. Provided they aren't put to the ultimate test, they last very well. The stitching doesn't fray or loosen, the leather remains supple for years and the plastic protectors stay on. They're also available to suit the Alpinestars' Tech 5 airbag system, or with Gimoto's own proprietary air bag system. Both suits are FIM approved for MotoGP and World Superbike.

The Australian agent for Gimoto is Ascari Works. The company's owner, Kelly Ridgewell, is a talented garment technician and experienced racer with decades of expertise. This goes a long way to achieving ultimate customer satisfaction. As well as assisting with measurement and purchase advice, Ascari provides full after-sales support and repair (the actual suit is made in Italy). It's an important consideration as it means a minor off isn't necessarily the end of the suit. A quality repair will be a fraction of the suit's replacement cost.

For road riders, Gimoto also offers custom-made road leathers, as either zip-together suits or as separates (jacket, pants). These garments may be at the very top of the leather tree when it comes to road protection and comfort.

More information about Australian purchase is available on the Ascari Works website.

THE BOTTOM LINE

At *ARR*, we think that as a rule, motorcycle clothing dollars are well spent when they bring joy (excluding the initial purchase pain). Something we've found custom suits always deliver.

Most riders won't ever buy a custom suit and will be perfectly happy about that, either because it's not a personally affordable option, or body shape wise they're statistically average enough to get away with an off-the-rack suit (lucky bastards). The way we see it, if it's about spending choices, high-kilometre road riders and racetrack punters would better served by premium clothing than tipping money into a go-fast exhaust system. It's like helmets – cheap ones work, but no one buys a cheap one after they've had a good one.

Finally, to answer the question I initially posed about "when's the time to buy tailor-made leather?", it's when the prospect of wallet damage isn't a barrier to getting the benefits of well-fitting gear, and/or... lap times stop dropping...

More info: ascariworks.com.au

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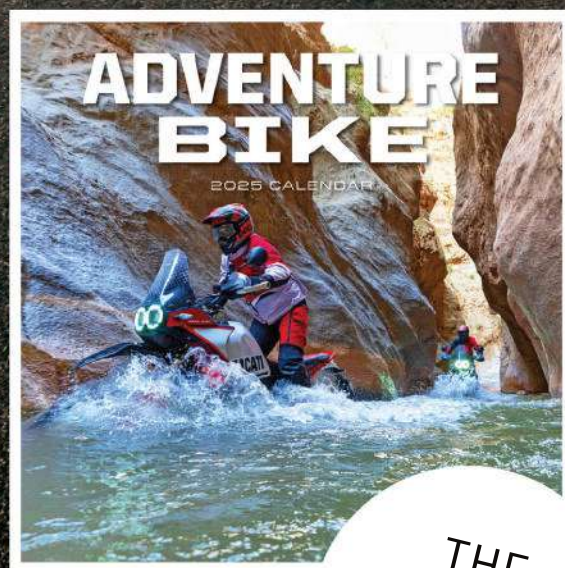
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PARTY TIME IN PATAGONIA

BY: BRIAN RIX



If you have a burning desire to travel the southernmost reaches of South America, a word of advice. Don't wait. Do it. Weather dictates that the best time is summer of course, November to January, although even then snow flurries are common in the deep south. Two-wheeled travellers all make their way to the end of the world for one of the best international parties you can have — Christmas and New Year in Ushuaia.

After collecting Big Red, the BMW GS, from Vina Del Mar in Chile, the mission is to get there in time and cram in the sites of Patagonia on the way. The region covers

around one million square kilometres of both Chile and Argentina and has more penguins than people. The riding can be challenging, with cross winds whistling through the Andes on Ruta 40, blowing you across the dirt road.

Riding up through the thin air of the Andes mountains time and again takes your breath away and gives you a headache. The pillion in a million took a leaf off the locals and swears the coca lozenges relieved the headache. It sure put a smile on her face. The danger is losing concentration on roads that are nothing more than goat tracks.

We find a hunting lodge in the middle of nowhere with the promise of a whole lamb slowly roasting on the asado coals for dinner. Paired with a nice Argentinian red and life's good until you hear the drum of heavy rain in the middle of the night. The road south waits for no one. We're on a mission to get to the end of the world. The dirt road in the picturesque valley turns into a muddy quagmire and a fully loaded Big Red turns into a wallowing hippo. The pillion in a million must dismount and trudge for a kilometre through sticky mud as I wheelspin us to firmer ground. The climb out of the valley turns to wet

slippery rocks on a winding two-wheeled track. Eventually the road leads us to a lake and ferry crossing, taking us back to the windswept plains and the vicious cross winds.

The desert landscape is empty except for a decrepit mud brick hut that has a well-worn petrol bowser at Bajo Caracoles. It's the only man-made structure for hours, but it's a necessary stop. Signs warn of the cross winds and this is no idle threat. Parking the bike on the side stand becomes an art form. Nose or tail into the wind, otherwise the bike will be blown over. To emphasise the point, we come across a semi-trailer blown over onto its side. This is a tough ride but as the riders know, nature at its wildest is awe-inspiring and we're right in it, not cocooned in a cage.

A side trip to El Chalten becomes necessary as clear skies show promise of great views of the elusive Mount Fitzroy. We're not disappointed.

The following day, still tracking south to our ultimate destination, it's weird to be kicking up dust on a desert road and see an iceberg slowly coming into view. We don't need any further encouragement to make yet another detour to take in the majesty of the Perito Moreno glacier. As we ride out to the best viewpoint it starts to rain, then sleet ice and finally wisps of snow! Patagonia throws up everything to challenge two-wheeled travellers.

The next day the sun is shining as the glacier puts on a show, groaning and calving huge chunks of ice. The locals fear they are losing their tourist treasure to the warming earth. Tracking further south towards the Magellan Strait, these more protected waters are now home to skeletons of ships battered by the southern oceans and long abandoned. A pungent smell announces we're close to seal colonies — a necessary stop to watch these lumbering beasts sharing the beach with cute penguins looking for somewhere to nest.

Taking in the majesty of Torres del Paine National Park and the exquisite guanacos and vicuna, animals that inhabit the higher plains, we ride carefully as herds wander across our bows or stop and stare at us on the same patch of gravel road we're vying for.

Riding the final leg into Ushuaia, the southernmost town in the world does not disappoint. Long sweepers, magnificent scenery and a sense of achievement. We've made it to the end of the world or the final gateway to as far as the road can take us south in the Americas. Next stop is Antarctica.

We've made it in time to park up our faithful Big Red BMW and hitch a ride on a ship to



TOP Pannier esky & beer. ABOVE Christmas BBQ.

the seventh continent. Howling winds, huge seas and freezing air make you wonder how the old sea dogs sailed square riggers through here before the lee of the Antarctic peninsula calms the swell. After crashing through ice, taking a zodiac ride through icebergs, getting up close and personal with penguins and seals, and taking a dip in the freezing waters, our visit is over too soon and we head back to be reunited with Big Red in Ushuaia.

But we're here for other reasons. Bernd and Heidi, our German KTM-mounted friends we first met on another ride through Iran, heard we were in South America. They quit their jobs, fettled their bikes and rode across Russia, freighted their bikes and tracked our progress so we'd meet up for Christmas at the end of the world. Hugs, beers and tears and it's time to party.

It's a tradition. Anyone on two wheels anywhere in South America makes their way to Ushuaia to party at Christmas time. We're among like-minded people from all over the world. The local campground is the place to be. There's another Aussie couple travelling on a well-abused KLR Kawasaki among the throng. A Christmas feast is called for, so the panniers on Big Red are emptied then stuffed with ice, beer and the staple of Argentina —

"THE DIRT ROAD IN THE PICTURESQUE VALLEY TURNS INTO A MUDDY QUAGMIRE"



ABOVE Ushuaia Christmas Tree.

meat for a good old Aussie barbecue with an Argentinian asado feel.

Slabs of lamb and a metre of spicy sausage curled like a mozzie coil sit over a makeshift barbie. The grill, a purloined grate from somewhere, balancing on rocks is a little precarious. Big Red's panniers are put to good use as Eskies and seats, but we're missing a Christmas tree. No worries, drink more beer. Soon we have enough cans to decorate a branch off a nearby tree. After drinking beer that kicks like a mule, it's clear the bikes aren't going anywhere for quite a while. As the party warms up, the campground owner invites everyone to an endless supply of mulled wine kept warm over low coals. I don't remember much after a few of those — other than the young Aussie KLR rider trying to climb a light pole, unsuccessfully.

The morning after was not a pretty sight. I found the young light pole climber curled up in the foetal position under a chair. By New Year's Day we were all sufficiently sober to take a joint ride out to the southernmost point of mainland South America, where we found a nice grassed spot next to a river and celebrated another year on our planet with a picnic of meat and cheese. Vegetarians must almost starve down here.

After the best party and reunion with old travelling friends, it's time to turn our wheels north. We're heading to Alaska, hoping to get there before the fireweed turns and the first sprinkling of snow. I have an urge to dip my toes in the Arctic Ocean. **ARR**

NEVER SAY NEVER

BY: GEOFF SEDDON

The secret to a long and happy motorcycling life is to follow the three golden rules. The first rule is to not crash. The second rule is to not crash, as is the third. Do as I say and not as I do.

I have been an accident-free zone since 1985, when I lost control of my first 900SS on the old Doom Diway near Tarcutta. I was doing an overnight run from Sydney to Broadford in Victoria for the annual Hells Angels rock concert and had just overtaken a semi-trailer when I hit a section of wet dirt roadworks, lost the front and went down like a ton of bricks. I remember pulling in my legs so as to not have them run over by the semi. My long-time riding buddy Steve Parker, who was following, thought I was gone for all money.

I could have died that night, which would have been devastating for my wife and our two young children. If I was to continue on with this motorcycling malarkey, I would have to do it without crashing.

And I never did. I started road testing for *Two Wheels* not long after that and spent most

of the next decade thrashing other people's motorcycles for money. And I never crashed one, possibly the only magazine road tester in history to ever retire making that claim. John Rooth told me I never crashed because I never rode fast enough. He was right.

We ended up having more children but often only owned one car, so whatever bike I had at the time had to do its bit carting kids to sport and stuff. Nothing like having number-one son riding pillion on our way to an U11s soccer match to focus one's mind on the three golden rules. Similarly, as I've gotten older and more frail, I realise I don't bounce like I used to and the consequences of a serious accident would be equally dire.

But you know what they say. Never say never.

It was an unseasonably warm day at the end of a cold wet winter when a posse of four headed off from Chateau Seddo for the Dunkirk Hotel in Spencer on the Hawkesbury River, with a brief detour to check out a cabin Simon had recently bought nearby. Tim and Simon were on their Ducatis, with me and Steve

riding our Triumphs. We are all in our 60s and have been riding together for 40 years.

Wiseman's Ferry Road from Central Mangrove is no racetrack. It's a gnarly bit of narrow bitumen that often falls into disrepair, but the first bit through to Spencer is in relatively good shape at the moment. I hung onto the back of the pack until the descent from Mangrove Mountain to Mangrove Creek, a challenging section of smooth tight corners which soon sorts the wheat from the chaff. I'm happy to plod along at my own pace rather than force myself to ride any faster and the other guys respect that. I won't be that far behind them when we stop.

The road then winds its way along the creek flats in the shadow of steep valley walls. The surface is bumpy and many of the corners are blind, but it's a beautiful part of the world and life was pretty good until suddenly it wasn't and I was sliding along the road listening to my beautiful new bike grind itself to bits beside me. What the fuck? It got even weirder when I finally came to a stop and saw Steve and Tim



Damaged but not destroyed.



“TWO BUSTED BIKES AND ONE BADLY INJURED RIDER DUE TO THE NEGLIGENCE OF AN ANONYMOUS TRUCK DRIVER”

getting off their bikes further up the hill and running down to help me.

Simon was the first to crash despite having just slowed the pack down as he approached his weekender. He'd gone into the lead to show us the turn-off when he hit three inches of mud and dirt midway through a blind shaded right-hand corner. He lost control and veered off to the left into a V-shaped earthen drain where he was currently pinned to the far wall by his 950S Supersport.

We later found out (from other truckies who stopped) that the driver of a white Freightliner tipper had failed to properly secure the tailgate of his dog trailer and was leaving deposits all the way past Spencer. In our case, he had hit a big bump which opened the floodgates going into the corner and on up the hill where I'd slid to a stop. The muck covered the entire lane.

Simon's pirouette into the ditch gave Tim just enough notice to get his 916SPS vertical and somehow keep it that way. Ditto Steve, who had more time on his Thruxton and avoided the worst of it. They had just got to Simon

when they heard the muffled tones of another Triumph approaching and had a first-hand view of me riding into the worst of the crud, which I obviously didn't see in the shade, and hitting the deck. The rear-view camera on Simon's Ducati also caught the action, the front tucking in and the back coming around for a classic low-side, the bike then slowly spinning up the road on the alternator cover. What felt like an eternity to me was over in a couple of seconds.

First on the scene were some friendly locals in a Commodore, who attended to triage and traffic management while Steve and Tim picked up my bike and helped me to sit up. They then returned to Simon, who had slammed into the wall of the drain hard enough to break his scaphoid and three ribs. I was more fortunate — nothing was broken. Removing my gloves exposed a bleeding wrist and there would be other war wounds to find later on, but I couldn't help thinking I got out of that lightly.

It could so easily have been much worse. The pace up front would normally have been hotter for a start. And on any other corner, it might have been trees on the verge, not

a drainage ditch. But we are still faced with two busted bikes — the Ducati a likely write-off — and one badly injured rider due to the negligence of an anonymous truck driver who was oblivious to the carnage he caused.

The Triumph crashed pretty well, as it turned out, another reason to ride a naked bike I guess. I was expecting worse. The bike slid on its right-hand side, with the alternator cover, the bar end of the clip-on and the muffler taking the worst of it. Both brake levers were bent but not so badly that I couldn't ride the bike home. The only damage to the bodywork is a broken front mudguard and support bracket, and the tiniest dent in the petrol tank that will probably bug me forever. Both right-side blinkers are toast. There's more gravel rash on the headlight rim and header pipe, and the numberplate is bent.

I've never insured a motorcycle and this one is no different. I'll replace the bits I have to as soon as I can, but addressing all the cosmetic stuff will take some time. My pristine, immaculate Thruxton R is not so immaculate or pristine anymore. **ARR**

BMW'S ROAD ROCKET

BY: NIGEL PATERSON



In the next issue of *Australian Road Rider* we will be publishing a test of the latest BMW XR, so we thought we'd have a look back at the earlier models of BMW's crossover machine.

Launched in 2015 — yes, that's almost a decade ago — the S 1000 XR was just about everything I wanted in a road bike: powerful (160hp), comfortable (upright riding position), tourable (panniers were an option) and equipped with good suspension (long travel and good quality kit). Damn shame I couldn't afford one then, but these days a cheap example will set you back about 10–12 grand, so it's a whole lot of motorcycle for not a huge sum.

ADVENTURE SPORTS

The "crossover" moniker hadn't really been invented back in 2015, so BMW described the S 1000 XR as an Adventure Sports machine, which made no sense to anyone. It had a detuned engine from the S 1000 RR sports/track bike and 17-inch wheels, so the sports part of the equation was there, but only the riding position from an adventure bike.

Whatever you called it, the S 1000 XR quickly became to be seen as the most capable four-cylinder road bike in BMW's line-up — it could do almost anything. Stupid fast thanks to the sportsbike engine, it was actually easier to use than the unit in the

RR model, thanks to more bottom-end and midrange power. Combined with the more relaxed riding position, it started to feel like a sportsbike you could ride all day... and for an added bonus the excellent suspension meant it was fast over bumpy roads, too.

ONE ANNOYING PROBLEM

The S 1000 XR is a physically big bike, tall and long, so even though it wasn't stupid heavy at 228kg, it feels heavy. Lifting it off the sidestand can be a challenge, getting your feet on the ground if you're under six foot tall a hassle. For larger riders though, the bike has proven to be comfortable on

Set up for touring.



"STUPID FAST THANKS TO THE SPORTSBIKE ENGINE..."

the long haul — maybe not seat comfort, but the riding position.

The biggest problem reported by owners was, however, a bit of a deal-breaker when it came to touring. At speeds of around 120km/h, the vibration through the handlebars was something we hadn't felt since the tingly fours of the 1980s. For the 2017 update, BMW built in an innovative rubber mounting system for the handlebars, but even on that model I'd be seeking out some aftermarket bar end weights designed to dampen the vibes.

VARIOUS SPEC

Typically for BMW, the bike was available as a base model (affordable at a little over \$22,000 at launch) but it got expensive quickly if the "packs" (touring, dynamic) were added — a fully spec machine with panniers was easily over 30K ride away.

These days, the value of the additional spec has faded somewhat, although we're told it's much easier to sell a high-spec bike than a base model. We certainly liked the dynamic pack and its additional riding modes, while the touring pack was essential if you wanted to use BMW's panniers... they may not have you over a barrel, but it's in the corner of the showroom.

For secondhand buyers this can be a boon, because you can now get a five-year-old bike with lots of tech and performance for around \$17,000... which is not much more than half of the price of a new one with similar spec.

RIVALS

We believe BMW built the bike to take on the Ducati Multistrada 1200, which was selling well and had many variants, including the Pikes Peak edition, a true rocketship. The Ducatis can be expensive to maintain, but BMW servicing is usually excellent and priced accordingly.

These days you don't have to go European, although it could be argued the KTM 1290 Superduke GT is another competitor, but really it's the Suzuki GSX-S1000GX from

Japan which is the closest out there. A great bike featured on the cover of a recent *ARR* issue, the Suzuki isn't quite as refined as the BMW, but it's a whole lot cheaper spec-for-spec. Kawasaki has had the Versys 1000 out for a while too, although it lacks the tech and isn't as powerful.

WHO ARE THEY FOR?

The S 1000 R is for a tall rider who wants a powerful bike that is aimed at street, rather than track, use. If you're not interested in riding on loose surfaces, you don't need the taller wheels of an adventure bike and if you're too old, sensible, or want to take a pillion passenger even occasionally, the S 1000 XR is a pretty incredible bike. *ARR*





1st 2023 R18 to be bobbed by BMW in Brisbane – Mark Moore.



Just had her fairings resprayed with some quality reproduction stickers. Looks brand new again, 2004 Honda CBR1100XX in matt black. – Australian Motorcycle Adventures

My XSR900 with just a few modifications – Dale Shallcross.



Love my 2020 Royal Enfield Interceptor! The chrome tank edition is faster, too! – Perry Pessia.



Out side on a sunny day BMW K1600 B – Phil Bell.

THAT BIKE OF YOURS

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This is my beautiful 2015 K1300S somewhere on the Leichhardt highway in QLD. It's such a capable and comfortable Sport Tourer that I'm always amazed at how many people aren't familiar with the machines – Ken Kemp.



Fully loaded Triumph Thunderbird LT in Campbell Town, Tassie - Mike Bazan



Enjoying the curves at Charlotte Pass - Mully Sung.



2013 FJR1300 heading to Parkes on a FOB ride - Tudor Stephens.



Home at last - Norm Needham.

Not my road bike, I hasten to add - Phil Hall.



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LAST LOOK

BY: NIGEL PATERSON

LOOKING BACK

I've been a bike journo since late 1991, which makes me seriously old... but interestingly I still get people asking me about bikes which I've had little chance of riding. I mean the Honda CB750 came out in 1969, when I was three! So while I've been lucky enough to have ridden some of the best motorcycles ever built, I certainly don't have a resume like Alan Cathcart's.

So let me just say the best bike I ever rode was a Honda XR250... actually no, it wasn't the bike, it was the trip – riding the trails of Cambodia through to Angkor Wat was simply amazing and goes down as a trip of a lifetime. Then there was the Kawasaki KLR650 – that was a great bike... ahh, maybe it wasn't the bike again, maybe it was riding the countryside of Mexico. Or a Lifan 200... nope, it was exploring Vietnam. Then again, it could be the Suzuki Hayabusa – but maybe having the opportunity to ride legally at 300km/h (on the speedo at least) was the buzz. Feeling the supercharging kick-in on a Z H2. Sliding a GSX-R1100 around Oran Park. Getting airborne on motocross bikes. Not crashing when everyone around you is, on an adventure ride...

Sometimes I think we focus too much on the bikes and not enough on the rides, but you've already guessed that – although there have been occasions when it really has been about the bike, like riding a Honda RC45 Superbike around Phillip Island. I've ridden a lot of bikes around that track, and that machine stands out as a rush no like other. Then there was the shovel-head Harley-Davidson Sportster I got to ride when I worked in a bike shop before becoming a journo – loud, grunty and with a



Bridge crossing, Cambodia...

hinge in the frame, it was a piece of shit but a gloriously fun piece of shit, and I still remember that 30-minute ride so well.

Another stand-out was chasing a rider who went the wrong way on an adventure ride in far-western NSW – I had to catch up a six-minute deficit before we ran out of fuel hundreds of kilometres from anywhere, so I went into "Dakar" mode on a KTM 990 Adventure R – and spent a crazy amount of time at 100mph on a loose surface. It was

"...LOUD, GRUNTY AND WITH A HINGE IN THE FRAME..."

incredible, and left me with an understanding of why riders keep going back to the Finke or Dakar Rallies, despite the danger, cost and work it takes to get there. It was a high I can imagine some people struggle to live without.

LOOKING FORWARD

BMW's R 1300 GS Adventure will be in stores by the time you read this, and I hope you have a look because boy, did the bike cop a flogging on Facebook when I published some photos of it there. And yeah, even I thought it has a look only a mother could love, but hey, no one is forcing you to buy one and if any bike could be considered a tool for a job, this is it.

I've always thought adventure bikes were pretty ugly, including the models I've owned. Despite this, BMW has incorporated adventure styling on the S 1000 XR, a bike I've been testing for a future issue. Its nose is reminiscent of adventure bikes, and I've no idea if they did that because the riding position is adventure-like or just because the Ducati

Multistradas did that first... but at least Ducati was pitching its 1200MTS as an adventure machine. The XR BMWs, with their 17-inch wheels, are even less suited to dirt roads than the old 17-inch-wheeled Multistradas (most of which now have a 19-inch front).

So styling wise, the old ugly is now becoming the new pretty. I dunno, I must be getting old, I still think bikes like the Hayabusa look great. **ARR**

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